

환생은 괜히/ 해 가지고

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INTIME FUSION FANTASY STORY

intime

I Reincarnated For Nothing

– 환생은 괜히 해가지고 –

- Part 4 -

-Author-
Toika

Chapter 77

Is This Really Happening Again? (1)

[Goo-goo-ohhhhhh!]

[Koohk. This region is falling apart! Everyone run away! Activate the defensive magic!]

[Currently, the defensive magic... It doesn't work!? The defensive magic can't be activated!]

[I knew it would be like this when they invaded us.]

[My god. All the Mana is being sucked into the temple!]

The ancient temple was accessible through the underwater tunnel that had been bore through the ocean floor. It was only accessible through the kingdom of the merfolks, so it was understandable as to why the true nature of this place hadn't been revealed in his previous life.

The only problem right now was the fact that the merfolk were unable to take control of the situation. The situation was akin to a powder keg that could detonate at any moment, and it could put the entirety of the ocean in danger.

[What about the human party!?]

[They went in, but they haven't returned. They might already be dead...]

When Artpe arrived at the site, the situation had already digressed into the worst case scenario. Artpe pushed aside the merfolk as he approached the underground tunnel, which was letting out copious amount of evil energy.

[Get out of my way.]

[Huh. It's the princess' master...]

[Shh! Be careful with your words!]

Maetel and Sienna had already entered the temple. The merfolk had stayed outside as guards. They were trying to make sure none of the creatures within the temple exited the temple. They were busily moving around setting up defensive measures that had been prepared beforehand in case of emergency. They tried to activate traps, but the temple was sucking in Mana from the surrounding. This was why none of their measures were working properly.

[What the hell is this? None of these are working properly. When were these made!]

[I... I just know that it has been over several hundred years.]

[Of course, they would become defunct after such a long period of time... There is nothing you guys can accomplish by staying here. I want everyone to back off.]

[But...]

[Back off!]

The merfolk could only bite their lips when confronted with Artpe's harsh order. Artpe clicked his tongue as he asked Roa a question.

"Can you eat all the Mana here?"

[Nyaaaaaa!]

She didn't even reply to her master's words. She immediately opened her mouth, and she started eating the energy within the temple. However, she was unable to eat all the energy being emitted by the temple. She could only absorb twisted energy, negative energy and energy with intense emotions infused within it.

Her efforts were enough to calm down the quakes occurring in this region. However, if the temple's tunnel was left alone, it would bring down the Anaid kingdom. Artpe sighed as he put down Roa.

"We will go at full speed from now on. I want you to eat everything you are able to."

[Nyaa!]

Roa gave a fierce reply, and her body immediately changed into black fog. She charged into the tunnel. Of course, Artpe followed behind her.

This was obvious, but the ancient temple and the underwater tunnel was outside the influence of the Road of Mermaids. Artpe wasn't good at swimming. However, he knew how to move through the water. He just had to activate the Hyper Rubbing within the water to cause a vibration!

[Nyaaaaahng!]

"I'll feed you everything within this temple, so don't worry about it. However, we have to join up with our party before we can do that."

[Nyaa.]

As they traversed the tunnel, they encountered numerous corpses of monsters strewn about. It was terrifying, but these creatures looked to have originally been merfolks. They were just much larger in size than a normal merman, and they possessed magical energy that was dyed with evil.

"These merfolk weren't part of the Anaid kingdom... I see."

There were two possibilities. Either they were combatants from elsewhere or they used to be part of the merfolk population. Maybe the ancient temple was sealed after the mermaid kingdom was established.

So who was the subject of this seal? Was it done by the merfolk that established this kingdom? Somehow, he had a hunch that this wasn't the case. The scenario was a bit different, but it felt as if he had experienced something similar in the past... Artpe was deep in thought, but Roa woke him up from his reverie.

[Nyaa! Nyaa!]

"Yes, yes. We'll pick up the pace. Anyways, they seemed to have resolved everything really quickly. They just zoomed past this place."

Artpe was well aware as to how strong Maetel and Sienna was. Still, he had been conservative in his judgement. He had traversed through the underwater tunnel, and by the time he arrived at the entrance of the ancient temple, he had seen the corpses of several hundred creatures. They were all high level monsters that exceeded level 210 or 220. This wasn't something one could do, because one was strong. As expected, they could probably just charge towards the Demon world...

[Nyaa!]

Roa called Artpe once again. Artpe raised his head, and he took in the underwater landscape. He replied in a low voice.

“Yes, I see it too.”

[Nyaa nyaa nyaa nyaa nyaa!]

There were truly large fragments of a boulder strewn about near the entrance to the temple. It seemed the boulder had acted as a seal for the temple. Artpe spoke to Roa, who was busy eating.

“You have to pick up everything, and you have to give it back to me later. All right?”

[Nyaa, nyaa nyaa-ah...]

She had been cheerfully eating everything, but he had asked her to throw up everything later. Those words really dampened Roa’s appetite. However, her master had already fed her truly delicious things before, so she had no choice. She clicked her tongue as she ate the boulder that had sealed the temple. She didn’t leave a pebble behind. She ate everything.

[Nyaa!]

“You ate it all? Good. Let’s go. We don’t have far to go.”

After they passed the entrance to the temple, there were pillars and hallways decorated with enormous stones and gems. As he traveled faster, the Mana of his party members became vivid. It was as if he could almost grasp it with his hands.

Even if their enemies were strong and fast, Artpe was able to catch up without getting into a single battle. Soon, he was close enough to hear the battle being conducted by Sienna and Maetel.

“Hoohp!”

[Koo-gahhhhhh!]

[Cursed beings! Those that oppressed and caged us...!]

“Hahhhht!”

The monsters had the lower body of a fish, so they were able to swim freely through water. Maetel and Sienna didn't budge an inch as they fought the monsters. No, it was apt to say they were overpowering the monsters.

“Hahp!”

[Koo-hahk!]

“Hoo-ahp. Unni get out the way!”

“Kyahhhk!?”

Thanks to the boots acquired from the Kraken, Maetel was able to move freely under water. She was able to dominate her foes. Sienna couldn't move as fast as Maetel, but she was able to kill all her enemies with a single powerful blow. Of course, this was possible thanks to the gauntlet she acquired from the Kraken.

[Dark Blue Ocean Spirit's Blessed Boots +3]

[It is a new Artifact created by Reinforcing the Kraken's Soul Boots three times. It allows the user to walk on top of water. Moreover, it allows the user to freely and quickly move around under water. Just by wearing this item the user's resistance to water and ice type attack increases. It amplifies strength and magical energy if the user is fighting underwater.]

[Dark Blue Ocean Spirit's Blessed Gauntlet +3]

[It is a new Artifact created by Reinforcing the Kraken's Soul Gauntlet three times. It has the ability to pull and store the ambient Mana in nature. The ability to store Mana is much greater underwater. The stored Mana changes form through the blessing, and it is imbued on the equipped weapon. It rapidly increases the weight, durability and magical energy of the weapon.]

“Dieeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee!”

[Koo-hahhhhkh!]

Sienna's sledge hammer was already large, but it grew further in size thanks to the

power of the gauntlet. She threw the hammer. Since the hammer possessed properties of water, there was no resistance from the water. It destroyed a whole region before flying back into Sienna's hands.

He never knew one could use the short range type skill called the Weapon Boomerang in such a horrifying manner. It was only a common low rank skill. Artpe gave up on thinking on the subject. He approached them.

"Oppa!"

"Artpe!"

Sienna and Maetel had just cleared the area. They greeted him with bright smiles on their faces. Of course, Roa was busy looting and sucking out the evil energy from the corpses created by the two girls.

"Artpe, what happened to that female Demon?"

"I killed her."

"Yes. All right."

He thought she would ask why he would kill a Demon he had already saved once. He had expected her to ask about the manner in which the Demon had died. However, Maetel just nodded her head, and she grasped Artpe's hand. That was it.

"Anyways, you should look at that. The merfolk that are showing up here are a bit strange, Artpe."

"Aren't they like Demons?"

"...yes."

It was as if he was reading the words within her heart. Maetel weakly nodded her head at Artpe's words. The evil energy and the cunning nature of these monsters reminded her of the Demons she fought at the auction house. They were too similar.

"If the demonification experiments against the merfolk had succeeded, I think the result would have been like this."

"If it succeeded, it probably would be backward compatible. There is a reason why it is called the ancient temple. These merfolk are of a different breed than the merfolk of the Anaid kingdom. I'm not sure if they were changed or they were always different like this..."

Maybe, it wasn't a coincidence that Teana chose to experiment on the merfolk after the humans. It was possible that she hadn't known about the ancient temple. However, it was more likely that she had captured all the merfolk of this kingdom to release the seal over the temple.

'Of course, I'm only talking about possibilities... The situation is a bit too coincidental.'

If he traversed the temple to reach the end, he'll find his answer. He might find a secret of the merfolk or he might find the being that sealed these merfolk. Maybe, he might find a connection to the Demon race.

The only problem was that the temple was bigger than he thought. His party was somewhat used to exploring large Dungeons now. In the past, they had entered a Dungeons with a light heart, yet they had come out with heavy luggages numerous times!

"Please don't let this take one year... Hoo. Let's head in for now."

"Artpe, what are we going to do if we get hungry? We are underwater!"

Maetel was more afraid of the starving beggars fighting within her stomach than an invasion by a large Demonic army. When she suddenly realized this fact, she became frightened. When she asked her question, Artpe could only answer her in a benevolent manner.

"Did you forget that we have the Kraken's corpse? If it is just the three of us, there is enough for us to survive for 5 years. Don't worry about it."

[Nya?]'

"Yes, that's right."

"Kraken's corpse... I want to eat it! I'm hungry!"

"No, we have to go a little bit further."

“Let’s go right now! Immediately!”

The impudent Greed Beast had busily ate curses up until now, yet she was covetous of what the humans had to eat. Then there was the gluttonous hero. She didn’t care if the giant squid was used for the demonification experiment. She only cared if fit was tasty or not.

“Hoo-hee. I’m glad you are ok, oppa.”

“Sienna... Thank you.”

Sienna calmly greeted him with a bright smile. Sienna was Artpe’s saving grace. He stroked her head as he spoke.

“All right. Let’s loot everything here too.”

The hero’s party had cleared numerous Dungeons in the past. Their abilities were truly astonishing.

The temple was so large that it made one wonder if this place was really built by the merfolk. They continued to advance, and they ruthlessly cut down any evil merfolk that attacked the party. As if to break up the monotony, there were traps and curses interspersed in between. They crushed or ate everything in their path, and the party advanced without a hitch.

It wasn’t just the size of the place or the difficulty of the monsters. It was such a harsh environment that a level 200 high class party would have given up on this place after a week.

Since they were deep underwater, there was considerable amount of pressure on their bodies, and they had to constantly have the Underwater Breathing magic activated. The most critical factor was the fact that a Dungeon Merchant couldn’t appear in this place. There was no way they could purchase food here.

[Nyaa! Nyaa nyaa nyaa?]

“All right. It is clean. This guy had a poison that kills anyone that consumes its flesh. The poison would have caused high fever and diarrhea before it ultimately causing death. Now it is a good source of protein.”

“Ya-ho! It’s time to eat!”

Since the Greed Beast Roa was able to absorb all the negative energy, the hero’s party was able to acquire provisions from the monsters they fought.

“Mmm. It’s tasty. This taste like shrimps.”

“Oppa, the ocean is really great! It is full of tasty things!”

“...I’m the sinner. I’m the one.”

[Nyaa-oooh, nyaa-ah!]

In front of hunger, they didn’t discriminate in eating human-like monsters. Normally, they would eat the Kraken, but when they got sick of eating the Kraken, they laid their hands on the merfolk. Even if they were uncomfortable with the upper half of the body, a merman’s lower body was that of a fish. The lower body stayed in the form of a fish, and they didn’t feel any guilt since it tasted like seafood.

“Artpe, I don’t like it boiled or steamed. I want to roast it.”

“Even if we try to roast it, it’ll become boiled. Don’t complain. Just eat.”

“What if I give Artpe a kiss instead?”

“You can’t.”

“Heeng. Why didn’t that work?”

This was how Artpe’s party arrived at the center of the temple without a hitch.

At that point, two months had passed since they entered the ocean.

Chapter 78

Is This Really Happening Again? (2)

For the past two months, they slept, ate and did business in turns. They used the rest of their time to tirelessly advance through the ancient temple. The ancient temple was longer and deeper than any Dungeon they had gone through. On the other hand, the party had grown so much that their martial prowess couldn't be compared to before.

They were rising in level as they fought the ancient merfolk. Even though the merfolk's levels also rose steadily, it didn't slow down the speed of their advance through the temple.

"Oohp. The water is heavy."

"Oppa~"

At some point, the party realized that the temple's hallway had narrowed. They realized the atmosphere within the temple had changed.

"Artpe, our surrounding became darker."

"The Mana's property has changed... The truly dangerous beings will come out now. You should be on your toes."

Once one enters the deep ocean, it's a place where sunlight doesn't reach. The only light that illuminated the surrounding was the Mana infused within the ocean water. As the properties of Mana changed, the light naturally changed in strength and chromaticity. It also meant that the abilities of the monsters changed depending on where they lived!

[Nyaaaaaaa.]

"You are very drunk on the energy."

If one had to pick a member of Artpe's party, who had grown the most in the past two month, it would have have to be Roa. She was born as the Greed Beast, and her growth

was dependent on what she ate. After being born, she had been traversing on the silk road up until now. However, the ancient temple exceeded anything she had come across before.

“As we travel further inward, the evil energy is being upgraded into becoming demonic in nature, so this result is to be expected. But...”

[Nyaa, nyaa-oooooh.]

Roa was currently at level 222. Sienna possessed the lowest level amongst Artpe’s party at level 235. This show how ridiculously fast Roa had grown. Of course, Maetel possessed the highest level at 246. Artpe was close behind her at level 245.

‘It’s incredibly hard for humans over level 200 to develop further. Every one of us were able to increase our levels in just two days. This is why a hero’s ability is labeled to be the best. Even the chef would be surprised by it.’

At this point, Artpe was sure of one thing. Maetel’s Innate ability of Acceleration was being shared by the party.

If not, he couldn’t explain why Sienna and he was growing at comparable speed as Maetel!

“Hmmm...”

“What is it, Artpe? Even if I am pretty, I’ll get embarrassed if you stare at me like that.”

“You are becoming more shameless.”

“It’s because I take after you, Artpe! We really are made for each other.”

He had enough circumstantial and material evidence to support his claim. If he explained it to her, she would just tilt her head in puzzlement. He didn’t know if she was acting ignorant or if she really wasn’t cognizant of it. In either event, this was what she wanted in her heart, so Artpe didn’t go out of his way to tackle this issue.

Even if her Innate ability was shared by the entire party, Maetel’s growth speed remained crazy. There was no change, so it wasn’t a big problem. At this point in time, he wondered if her ability was being applied equally instead of being split.

[Koo-hoo-ahhhhhhhh]

Artpe's party was traveling at high speeds. They were vigilant of their surrounding as they explored the heart of the temple. At that moment, they heard the breathing sound of terrifying monsters from far away.

"I wondered why we didn't run across anything for a long while."

"It feels like they are mid-bosses. If we compare it to the Demon King's army, they are like the Four Heavenly Kings."

"So they are inconsequential?"

"...yes. I guess they are."

These were elite monsters that had been asleep for countless years. They had opened their eyes to punish the delinquents that had dared to invade the deepest part of the temple. It wasn't just one or two monsters. Artpe already sensed five of them.

"They are over level 250..."

"It's all right. We can win against them."

"Of course, we can win against them. Still, you shouldn't underestimate them. You should face them one at a time."

"All right."

As one traveled further up in level, the difference between a single level became stark. Moreover, one had to keep in mind that monsters drastically increased in power every 50 levels. If one considered this point, the monsters living at the heart of the temple were truly calamitous.

What would have happened if they were released into the ocean? The Lunatic Wave that impacted on Diaz would look like a joke compared to what would happen.

'I've always had this thought, but isn't the world too unstable? If there were no heroes, the Demon King's army would have no reason to step forward. In spite of that the human realm seemed destined for ruin...'

Artpe grumbled as he raised his hands. White magical energy was produced from the tip of his fingers. It covered the entire party as it formed a pentagonal barrier of light.

It's identity was a Priest's skill called the Holy Barrier. It was mainly used to block magical energy, but it also had the effect of resisting against physical attacks. This barrier could be used in conjunction with Mana String and Hyper Rubbing. It increased the power of the barrier to fantastical level. Now Artpe didn't hesitate to call these two spells as his main power.

[Ka-ha!]

After Artpe created the barrier, a monster valiantly charged out from the darkness. It rammed into the barrier. Just a single collision created a large crack, and instead of maintaining the barrier, Artpe purposefully broke apart the barrier. The fragments of the barrier embedded itself into the body of the monster.

[Koo-wahhhhhng!]

[Hweeeee. Our enemies...!]

“They are coming from other directions. Be on your guard!”

Holy Barriers formed wherever Artpe waved his hands. As if they were keeping a promise, the monsters rammed their heads wherever the barriers had formed.

Of course, Artpe was using his Read All Creation ability, so he was able to read their Mana and life signs. He could predict their paths, so he had created the barriers beforehand. From the perspective of the monsters, it was a very frustrating development.

“Sienna!”

“Yes, unni!”

The rest of the party members didn't pay attention to the other monsters. They focused on the monster that had charged in first. They focused their attack on the monster that had been battered by Artpe's magic. This was a tactic that couldn't be used unless they were confident that Artpe could block the advance of rest of the monsters.

[Nyaaaaaaaaaaaaa!]

“Now!”

Roa absorbed the monster’s demonic energy. When the monster lost focus, Maetel used her long sword. It shot out towards the monster’s body under the influence of her Innate ability of Acceleration.

[Koo-oh-ahhhhhhhh!]

“Divine Hammer!”

Her consecutive attacks didn’t allow the monster to form a skill or a spell. It screamed as it tried to retreat. Hover, Sienna was already ready for it. She gripped her enormous hammer, and she brought it down on the monster! The monster was already filled with evil energy, so Sienna’s single blow brought its life to an end.

“One down! Next!”

“Hurry up!”

“I’m going right now!”

While the girls were able to leisurely kill a single monster, Artpe was busy using consecutive Holy Barriers and Mana Strings.

Artpe’s Mana Strings were connected to ten Holy Barriers. When Artpe twitched his fingers, the Holy Barrier sliced through the ocean water to stop the charge of the four monsters. How much spare Mana did one need to pull this off? It was a shocking sight!

“Divine Hammer! Divine Hammer!”

“Hoo-ooooohp! Beaaaaam!”

[Nyaaaa!]

Artpe was amazing for blocking monsters over level 250 by himself, but the rest of his party members were amazing too. The three of them were able to kill each monster by pouring out their skills at once.

Artpe was famous for possessing vast quantities of Mana, so he was the exception. Of course, the battle was a bit of a handful for Maetel and Sienna. However, all their difficulties were solved with Maetel's Record Divide skill. For them, Artpe's magical energy was like an endless source.

[Kyaa-hahhhhhk!]

[This is vexing. Our enemy is right in front of our eyes...]

He had been telling the truth that each level up brought significant change. However, the level up of the members of the hero's party couldn't be compared to a normal level up. Their increase in ability was overwhelming.

In the past two month, Maetel had perfected and adapted the use of Acceleration, while they explored the temple. Sienna was able to showcase more powerful abilities than Maetel when she faced Demons or monsters that possessed the Demonic gene. They were able to flawlessly kill opponents that were 10 or 20 levels higher. They didn't even receive a single scratch in the fight.

Roa got ahold of the enemy to weaken the monster. Maetel brought down the guard of the monster, and Sienna finished it by striking the monster with her powerful energy. Their ability to link their skills had reached full maturity.

"Artpe, there is still one left!"

[Koo-ohhhhhhhhhhhhh!]

"Tsk. What a nimble bastard..."

In no time, four monsters were killed and there was only one left. The remaining monster was much bigger and stronger than the others.

It possessed brutal power. It could break his Holy Barrier with just one charge. This particular monster had come after Artpe from the beginning. It had charged after Artpe once it had caught sight of him.

[Koo-ohhhhhhhhhng!]

In terms of Mana, Evil Reflector Sienna would repulse the monster more. Maetel's attacks were able to create a more destructive result. It wouldn't have been strange if

the monster had decided to attack either of the girls. However, the monster had come after Artpe as if he was a sworn enemy. He had no idea why this was the case.

“Sienna, give me your Mana!”

“Yes!”

He shared Sienna’s Mana through Maetel. Since this monster possessed Demonic energy, this monster was only a slightly annoying foe.

“Die!”

[Koo-haaaaaaaaaaaaahk!]

The Mana String was formed after being infused with a significant amount of Sienna’s Mana infused within it. Several dozen threads shot out at once from Artpe’s body. They pierced through the entire body of the monster, who had been charging forward as if it wanted to crush Artpe.

It was reminiscent of a magic that had appeared only once in the past. It was a magic used by the highest priest, who was the proxy of a god. It looked like highest ranked imprisonment magic called the God’s Chain.

[Koo-ohhhhhng! Ooh-goo-ahhhhhng!]

There were eight thick octopus legs attached to its lower body. It stretched its legs out all at once to resist against the attack, but Maetel and Sienna followed up immediately with their attack. In the end, it died in a futile manner. Maetel was right. It hadn’t been much of an opponent like the Four Heavenly Kings. This fact hurt an unknown portion of his heart.

Maetel tilted her head in puzzlement, while she looted the dead enemy.

“This guy has the face of a human, yet it only made unintelligible sounds.”

“As we travel deeper, we are more inclined to find such beings. As these monsters fail to reach an equilibrium between their demonic energy and pure Mana, their intelligence starts to deteriorate. They chose the wrong path to become stronger, and this one is probably at the end stage of this process.”

[Nyaa nyaa-ah.]

It didn't matter if her enemies were smart or dumb. They were just delicious preys for Roa. However, she suddenly tilted her head in the middle of consuming the monster's demonic energy.

[Nyaa-ah? Nyaa nyaa-ha? Nyaa-ooh-ahh?]

"You tasted this somewhere before? It probably taste like all the monsters you've been eating up until now."

[Nyaa, nyaa nyaa! Nyaa nyaa-ah nyaa nyaa nyaa!]

"Ha. You are forcing me to delve deeper into this."

Artpe let out a sigh as he widened both his eyes. It wasn't difficult to read the information from a dead corpse.

His Read All Creation ability assessed the Ancient Merman, who had octopus legs. All the records regarding the monster appeared in front of his two eyes...

[Ancient Kraken Merman]

[Level : 261]

[Mixed blood between Ancient Kraken and the Ancient Merfolk. The Demonic gene was applied to the two Races. It caused an overlap that resulted in a miraculous birth. An excessive amount of demonic energy is focused in this small body, and it ate away at its soul. It grew in an unbalanced manner.]

"...what?"

Artpe couldn't believe his own two eyes, so he spoke out with a dumbfounded voice. However, this was information found through his Read All Creation ability, so there was no way the information was wrong.

He quickly checked the corpses of the other four monsters. Their names were revealed to be either Ancient Merman or Ancient Mermaid.

They were of an ancient race of the ocean that arose from the primal source of

demonic energy.

Yes, they were all the same except for the one called the Kraken Merman.

[Koo-oooh-ohhhhhh.]

As if it had been trying to time this exact moment, an imposing sound rang out from the deepest part of the temple.

It was the sound of mourning for the children that had died in this place. The voice sounded as if it wanted its children to rest in peace, since it would finish what they had started.

Artpe already knew the identity of the monster.

It truly was an unfortunate turn of events!

[Koo-ohhh-ahhhhhng.]

The voice sounded a little bit closer. Soon, it would be very close. Artpe let out a benevolent laughter as he caught Roa by the scruff of her neck.

“Hey. I thought you said this place wasn’t that dangerous.”

[Nyaa-ahhhhhhhhhh.]

Roa replied by pointing out there was no way she could know everything. Even her master hadn’t known about this. To his regret, she had told him the correct answer. Artpe could no longer berate her. Moreover, even if he had known that there was a dangerous being hidden within the temple, he probably would have entered no matter what!

“Artpe, is it the boss?”

“Yes, it’s the boss.”

Artpe answered Maetel’s question. He let out a bitter laugh as he spoke further.

“We’ve become stronger. I’m sorry, but we’ll have to put our lives on the line as always.”

[Koo-ohhhhhhhng!]

Soon, the heinous beast that had been sealed within the ancient temple made its appearance. The Ancient Kraken made its appearance.

This time it was an octopus.

Chapter 79

Is This Really Happening Again? (3)

It possessed a pitch black body, and its terrifying eyes looked on in an arrogant manner. The thing that stood out the most was the size of its body. It was no wonder why this temple was so large. If the humans that were defending against the Lunatic Wave saw this monster, they would have quickly given up on any prospects of living.

[Ancient Kraken]

[Level : 291]

[One of the beast born from the ancient primal source of chaos. After being sealed for countless years, it has been severely weakened.]

“Mmmmm. So it is already in a weakened state.”

Artpe faced the enormous Kraken as he solemnly nodded his head. Its single leg could probably crush the Hellfire Sentinel. If this opponent hadn't been in a weakened state, his party wouldn't have stood a chance. It was a fortunate turn of events.

[Nyaa, nyaa啊!]

“Hey, I already know that.”

Roa salivated whenever she discovered any source of demonic gene or negative energy. She always wanted to attack her preys immediately. However, she was stuck to Artpe's arm in fear. She knew that she would be killed if she took a wrong blow from the monster.

She had decreased the level gap compared to the previous Kraken, but this Kraken held an overwhelming advantage in magical energy and strength.

'However, this is a bit... Ah, I see how it is. I had a hunch that it might turn out like this.'

When the Ancient Kraken was mobilized, he was able to see the heart of the ancient temple, which had been surrounded by darkness until this moment. Everything was revealed in front of his eyes. Artpe's sharp eyes caught sight of the 'altar' located at the corner of the temple. In a single moment, he was caught up to everything.

However, Artpe wasn't able to leisurely observe the temple as long as he wanted.

[Koo-ohhhhhhhhhhh!]

"Koohk!?"

He wondered if the vibration around the Ancient Kraken would continue indefinitely. However, in the next moment, water and Mana coalesced into several dozen strands. The magic spell shot towards Artpe's party like lasers. Artpe quickly formed his Holy Barriers to block the attack. Of course, the Holy Barriers were pulverized.

"Artpe, do we have to call back the red lady again!?"

Even if Artpe put the Blink Boots back on her, Maetel didn't have the courage to fight this monster head on. So she desperately called out after him.

Artpe stacked several dozen Holy Barriers at once, and he was able to stop the lasers. He shouted back some unexpected words.

"I feel like we can win against it!"

"What!? How?"

"I want you guys to turn around and run towards the entrance of the temple! I want you to draw its attention!"

"It feels as if you are throwing us out there as sacrifices. I'm wrong, right!?"

Even as Maetel tried to undercut Artpe's orders with her words, she obediently turned around. She grabbed ahold of Sienna, who couldn't run as fast as her. Then she used Acceleration to run away with Sienna in tow!

Several strands of water tried to chase after her, but Artpe blocked them with the

several dozen Holy Barriers he had created. The attack was in vain. This made the Kraken lose interest in chasing after Maetel. Instead, it started to head towards Artpe!

“Maetel, provoke it!”

“Ooh-ee-sheeng!”

At Artpe’s firm instructions, Maetel had no choice but to provoke the Ancient Kraken. Maetel was sharing Mana with Sienna. She put all of Sienna’s Mana into her long sword to amplify its power. Then she shot out her sword beam!

[Koo-goo-ohhhhhhhng!]

No matter how high its level was or how long it had lived, the Ancient Kraken was weak against the Mana of an Evil Reflector. The Ancient Kraken didn’t have the time to avoid the attack, so it took the beam head on. Cross-popping veins arose from the black body.

It probably suffered very little pain from the attack when one considered the size of its body. However, its eight tentacles twitched, and an incredible amount of water was sent towards the girls. It flew like a bullet!

[Koo-ahhhhhhhng!]

“Kyaaah. It is effective.”

“Artpe, I hate you! I’m going to kiss you later!”

Its body was massive, so everyone had assumed it would be a bit slow in speed. However, it started charging forward as if it would break everything that got in its way. It didn’t care if it destroyed the temple. Maetel was taken aback. She desperately activated Acceleration to start running away.

“Divine Punishment! Divine Punishment! Divine Punishment! Divine Punishment!”

[Koo-ahhhhhhhh!]

Sienna was being carried like a sack by Maetel. She extended one hand backwards, and she continuously used her Divine Punishment skill. She was trying to slow down the monster, but her attacks only made the monster angrier. There was no doubt that her

attacks were a great way to provoke the Ancient Kraken.

[Goo-wahhhhhh!]

“You guys are doing great! Maetel and Sienna fighting!”

“Hate you! I hate you!”

The Ancient Kraken ceaselessly sent streams of water towards them, while it rushed through the temple at ridiculous speed. Maetel was desperately activating her Acceleration skill. They were returning at a speed 100 times faster than the speed at which they explored the temple.

‘This will burden their bodies, but... If we kill it, a level up is a guarantee. Please suffer a little bit more, Maetel.’

Artpe hid himself. He waited until the Kraken was completely out of sight. He took in a deep breath as he opened his eyes. His vision was filled with the altar, which he had observed once before.

There was one book bound in red leather and another bound in blue leather placed atop the altar. It was a familiar sight.

“Sunbae-nim, you also came here?”¹

[Nyaa-ah?]

He knew heroes were busy bodies, but he never expected one to leave behind his trace in such a place... No. In truth, he had an inkling of an idea that this might be the case when he entered the mermaid kingdom of Anaid.

It was said that Anaid was constructed couple hundred years ago.

It was unfortunate that he couldn't pinpoint the exact era. However, it was several hundred years ago, so it was an era that had nothing to do with the current hero or the Demon King. It was when the legends of the prior generation or the one before that had lived. This was why he hadn't ruled out the possibility that the previous generation's hero had visited this place. Moreover, this sunbae-nim had was proficient in magic to tie an entire Dungeon with the Record Link. If it was this sunbae-nim, he would have been able break the common sense and the Record regarding the merfolk

of the Anaid Kingdom. He tied all the merfolk together. This would have made it possible for the merfolk to create the Road of Mermaids. His suspicion had deepened over time.

Now he had found the altar, and his suspicion had been confirmed.

‘That’s right. The merfolk couldn’t have made such amazing magic by themselves...’

Artpe let out a sigh as he approached the altar. As expected, there were words related to the ancient temple. It was the heroic tale left behind by his sunbae-nim.

“I couldn’t handle the Ancient Kraken, so I drove it into this place. Then I sealed it. The merfolk that were born close to the source of the chaos were used as mediums to tie down the Ancient Kraken. This seal will remain unbroken for several thousand years at the very least. The seal was placed using merfolk possessing demonic energy. If merfolk with demonic properties show up once again in the outside ocean, I cannot guarantee what will happen to this seal...”

Stop it. Please don’t tell me that the Demons plotted all of this with this in mind!

He wished fervently that the Demon King’s army wasn’t this smart. However, no matter how much he thought about it he came to the conclusion that the Demons had known about the condition that would unseal the ancient temple. Artpe could only sigh.

‘They came up with a perfect plan, and they carried it out meticulously. The only variable that could have turned the table was us!’

Conversely, the Demon King’s army had set up such a meticulous plan, yet his party had been able to solve everything. This fact made him feel annoyed! In truth, Maetel and he had fucked over all plans carried out by the Demon King’s army! He even foiled plans that were only suspected of having Demon involvement.

Artpe really didn’t want to become the main character, yet the events around him kept twisting to push him into the spotlight! For what reason! Why! At this rate, this would negatively impact his plan of living a peaceful life as a dairy farmer in his old age!

I reincarnated for nothing!

[Nyaa-ah-ah.]

"All right. I'll calm down."

Artpe scratched the back of Roa's neck as he regained his sense of calm. He continued to read the words carved into the altar.

"If you are reading these words, it means the seal has been broken, and you have killed the Kraken. I give my thanks to you. As a reward, I prepared a Unique Skill Book and a Spell Book, which responds to your Class. I hope these items will be of help to you. If the one to kill the Kraken was a hero, you did well my junior. You've already visited my grave, right? This Skill Book and Spell book will strengthen the Unique Skill and Spell you have already learned."

[Nyaaaaaa.]

Artpe had no idea how he pulled it off, but his sunbae had embedded two functions into a single Skill Book.

The first function was like the Cultivation Dungeon they had visited. The content of the Skill Book was determined once one learned it. The second function was a contingency plan where it would strengthen the skill and spell one had learned within Cultivation Dungeon. Since Maetel and Artpe had learned the requisite skills from the Cultivation Dungeon, their skills were qualified to be strengthened.

'He expected the younger generation hero to have found his grave first. His attitude is very shameless...'

They actually went there, so it couldn't be helped. Moreover, he had no idea what method was used to create such a Skill Book and Spell Book. He was baffled.

'However, the important point right now isn't the fact that the sunbae had established the Anaid Kingdom and the Road of Mermaid. The fact that he had sealed the Kraken within the temple, and the preparation of the Skill Book and the Spell Book isn't important either.'

The most important phrase was written elsewhere.

This was it.

[The altar will fall once the Skill Book and Spell Book is learned. If the altar falls, the temple falls. Be careful when you escape this place. If you are my junior, you already

know this fact since you've already visited my grave!]

"That bastard did the same thing here again!"

[Nyaa?]

This sunbae bastard didn't provide any answers, yet he was trying to bury his juniors alive after letting them learn the skills! He had an inkling that this would turn out like this, and he had been right!

Still, he was looking forward to this. When he destroyed the temple, he'll find a way to defeat the Kraken. The odds were still slim. When he discovered the altar, he had hopes that something would happen if he destroyed it.

"The problem right now is the fact that we haven't defeated the Kraken yet. We can't learn the Skill or Spell yet.'

Artpe focused his attention on the words left behind by his sunbae. If he learned the Skill and Spell, the altar would fall. Then the temple would fall. The normal order was to learn the Skill and Spell to trigger the destruction of the altar...

"If the altar falls first, will the temple follow?"

[Nyaaaa...]

Roa cried as if she found him to be hopeless. Artpe ignored her as he opened his Dimensional Pouch. He took the Skill Book and Spell Book! The Skill Book and Spell Book couldn't be taken separately, but he was using the Dimensional Pouch. It was possible to suck in both items through the suction created by the Dimensional Pouch!

"It worked!"

[Nyaaaaaaaaa!]

This in turn caused the destruction of the altar. The altar had been controlling the flow of Mana within the temple. It caused the Mana to flood in an uncontrolled manner, and it started the collapse. It started to cause destructive fissures in the surrounding! As expected, the prior hero was great at weaving magic, yet he was idiotic about setting the crucial details!

Artpe had yelled out in delight, but he was in a tight spot. The enormous temple was crashing down on itself, and the large fragments were falling towards Artpe's head. He had used a similar attack on a Kraken before, and now he was in a position of suffering a similar fate!

"Hoo... Let's head out, Roa."

[Nyaa-ah-ah...]

Roa grumbled that she would have gone with the unnis if she knew things would turn out like this. He ignored her cries. He firmly held onto the Dimensional Pouch, which held the precious Skill Book and Spell Book. He turned around, and he activated the ability of his Blink Boots.

"Let's go!"

[Nyaa nyaa-ahhhhhht!]

If he could see a location, he could travel there with a companion using the Artifact. After Reinforcing it three times, Artpe could activate Blink as long as he had Mana left. If he didn't have this boots, he wouldn't have invited trouble like this.

[Nyaaaaa! Nyaa-ah-aht, nyaa-ah!]

"It's all right. If I hadn't destroyed this, we would have died here anyways!"

As expected of an ex-Four Heavenly King, he lived a life that was closely connected with death. He prayed that Maetel and Sienna, who had gone ahead of him, didn't get hit by the fragments from the temple. He activated his Blink ability.

He was able to predict the trajectory of the fragments using his Read All Creation ability. He Blinked into safe spaces! None of the fragments were able to hit him as it destroyed the ocean floor.

[Koo-wahhhhhhhhhng!]

He heard a roar in the distance. It seemed a large fragment had hit the Kraken. It made Artpe laugh. All right. The true boss fight would start from this point on!

"Artpe, I hate youuuuuu! I'll do something worse than kissing you!"

“ ”

[Nyaa-ah-ah.]

“Shut up. Don’t make any predictions.”

Suddenly, he felt a little bit afraid of going forward. However, he had no choice. Artpe thought about getting purposefully hit by a fragment, so he could use it as an excuse. As he seriously mulled this idea over, he activated Blink again.

Chapter 80

Is This Really Happening Again? (4)

The Ancient Kraken had been sealed several hundred years ago by a hero. It had faded into the darkness, and it had been forgotten over the long years. However, the Ancient Kraken finally revealed itself once again to the world. It was incredibly angry right now.

[Koo-ga-ahhhhhhhh!]

The Ancient Kraken's son was dead. The seal wouldn't have been completely broken unless its son was dead.

These damn heroes were also emitting an annoying energy that disturbed its core being. They had also went so far as to commit acts of brutality. They were destroying the entire temple before it could get out of this cramped prison!

[Koo-ahhhhhhhhhhhng!]

All the materials making up the temple was critically harmful to the Ancient Kraken's demonic gene! Moreover, these materials weighed several dozen to several hundred tons. These fragments were dropping towards the Ancient Kraken. Of course, the assault of the fragments caused harm to it.

Moreover, the Ancient Kraken was truly enormous, so it didn't matter how fast it was traveling. It couldn't avoid the falling temple fragments. It was being continuously pelted by the fragments infused with holy power. The Ancient Kraken's hard skin cracked under the assault, and blood gushed forward.

“If you are going to destroy this place, you should have told us! Artpe is bad!”

“When he said we can win against it, he meant he was going to do this. As expected, oppa is amazing. He is too cool.”

“He is cool! That is neither here nor there!”

Maetel and Sienna was simultaneously facing the destruction of the temple and the anger of this savage monster. It was an unbearable situation.

She was able to endure the backlash of her Acceleration skill relatively well thanks to her growth. However, she was running away from a level 290 boss monster, while she was dodging the temple fragments. It put an unbelievable stress on her mind.

“Unni, it’s coming!”

“You have to deflect that. I can’t dodge it!”

“That!?... eek. All right! Ha-ahp!”

Maetel was continuously activating her Acceleration, while she carried Sienna. While she was being carried, Sienna deflected any fragments that Maetel couldn’t dodge using her hammer! Their ability to work together was a vision to behold.

“Ah, unni! I just had a good idea!”

“I probably won’t understand it, so don’t explain it to me. Do as you please!”

“Yes, I understand!”

Maetel was too busy using her Acceleration repeatedly, while she assessed her surrounding. Unlike her, Sienna had some time she could spare. She hadn’t been mindlessly deflecting the fragments. She had been brainstorming to come up with an idea to help Maetel.

Currently, she had a gauntlet that imbued the power of the Kraken into her weapon. Then there was the hammer, which had gone through three Reinforcements. It had the ability to store and release vibration. If she activated both abilities at the same time, maybe...!

“Unni, you don’t have to dodge that fragment!”

“That one is really big. Eh-ee. Whatever!”

Maetel didn’t trust Sienna, but she trusted in Artpe, who had faith in Sienna. Instead of dodging the fragment that was falling from above, she charged towards it. Of course, the Kraken continued its mad chase after them.

“Hoohp... Just a little bit more!”

“Sienna! I don’t know what you are trying to do, but hurry up! I want to kiss Artpe, not that hunk of rock!”

When Maetel once again activated her Acceleration, the Kraken shot another stream of water. There was an incredible driving force behind the water, and it was charging violently towards the two girls. At that moment, a truly large temple fragment fell towards the heads of the party members!

“Ha-ahhhhhhhhp!”

Sienna used the Kraken’s power to strengthen her hammer, and she focused the power of vibration stored within the hammer. She unleashed all the power as she swung the hammer overhead. The head of the hammer hit the fragment as the fragment was about to drop on top of them. The fragment was deflected.

“Goo-oooooooooh?”

“Kyahhhhhhhk!”

It was such a heavy fragment that the rebound caused Maetel and Sienna to be pushed forward in a rough manner. Yet, somehow the fragment changed direction to head straight towards the Kraken. The fragment containing a massive amount of Sienna’s holy power squarely struck the Kraken!

[Koo-ahhhhhhhhhhh!]

A scream that was unlike any before erupted from the Kraken as it writhed. It was so painful that the Kraken stopped its charge, and its eight legs spread out as it caused mayhem.

From all around its body, balls of water coalesced to shoot towards the two girls like beams of laser. Maetel felt something hot on her trail, so she desperately twisted her body to dodge the attack.

“What the hell did you do!”

“I just attacked it! It must be really painful! Unni, let’s hit it again with the same attack!”

“I’m going to die. I’m really going to die!”

Maetel had a tearful face as she once again charged forward. It wasn’t a simple charge. She kept calculating paths that would make her come across the falling fragments. She was doing this while she used her Acceleration skill. It allowed Sienna to easily swing at the falling fragments with her hammer. Moreover, it allowed all the momentum generated by their sprint to be transferred into the fragments.

Even Artpe wouldn’t have been able to calculate the route in such a short amount of time. Of course, Maetel was taking the most optimal route by instinct. She was the best at tasks that involved moving one’s body. No one could catch up to her in that aspect!

“Uh uh... Eh-eet!”

[Koo-ha-ahhk!? Keeeee-hahhhhhhhk!]

Maetel’s efforts resulted in Sienna being able to strike the fragments with a much more natural swing. This resulted in the fragments containing much more power behind it compared to the first fragment. The proof could be seen by how the Kraken reacted. It writhed in a more violent manner.

[Koo-hahk! Kee-hahhhk!]

“...unni, I think we might kill it before oppa get here.”

“No. This is only the beginning... Sienna, hold tight!”

“Kyahhhhhhhh!”

In the past, they had killed a Kraken that had been suffering under a curse of madness. It had repeatedly charged forward like a battering ram. Instead of fighting its enemies, it felt as if the Kraken had been trying to overcome an obstacle.

However, the Ancient Kraken was acting differently. While it charged forward, it continuously shot water lasers towards its enemies. Now it started to shoot out its ink!

[Goo-oooooooohng!]

“Koohk. It is cutting us off from the ambient Mana...!”

“Unni, be careful!”

It was a truly astounding development. The ink shot out by the Ancient Kraken had the effect of absorbing the nearby Mana for its own use.

What was the effect of this attack? It immediately made it harder for Maetel and Sienna to generate Mana. Moreover, the water lasers started forming from every direction. Up until now, it had only formed only around the Kraken’s body!

“Ooh-ahhhhhhhhhh!”

“Unni!”

She resisted against the Kraken’s Mana, which was pressuring her from all sides. She forcefully energized her Mana to activate the Acceleration skill, then she activated the option contain within her boots.

This would cause a significant amount of burden on Artpe, but she had no choice! She maxed out her Record Divide. She pulled Artpe’s vast magical energy towards her.

“Hoo-ooooh...”

She shut her eyes tight before she opened them. She activated her senses to its fullest extent. She was able to capture the location of the falling temple fragments, the tentacles, the Kraken’s body and the reaction caused by laser’s energy. On top of that, she chose directions that would bring her close to fragments that would add to the power being imbued by Sienna’s strikes!

“That one, and that one! Hit them!”

“Ooh-goo-ahhhhhhhh. All righhhhhhhht!”

There was a flurry of lasers, ink and tentacles coming towards her, yet Maetel didn’t allow these attacks to hit her. She even increased her speed further. It made it harder for Sienna to swing her hammer, but she didn’t have time to complain about it!

“Hoohp! Hoo-ooooooh-ahp!”

[Koo-ha-ah! Koo-wee-ooh-ahhhhhhhh!]

Sienna followed Maetel's direction. She swung her hammer with all her might, and she sent two additional fragments towards the Kraken. The Kraken controlled its lasers to shoot down one fragment, but it was helplessly struck by the remaining fragment.

Since both sides had increased their speed, the impulse generated was much larger. The fragments infused to the brim with Sienna's holy power exploded after being embedded deep within the Kraken's body. It caused profound damage to the Kraken's enormous demonic energy.

[Koo-ahhhhhhhhhh!]

The Kraken was going completely insane. Ink was pouring out of it, yet the hero's party was still able to run away from the Kraken! Artpe caught up with his party around this time.

“What an absolute mess... Roa!”

[Nyaa nyaa nyaa-ahhhhhht!]

Roa, who was being held close to Artpe's bosom, opened her mouth. This was obvious, but she was sucking in the ink being released by the Kraken!

“Aht... Artpe!”

“Don't look back! Just run!”

The ocean water had been dyed black. When the ocean water regained its normal color, the Kraken's control over the ambient Mana lessened. Maetel and Sienna started running away at a much faster speed.

[Koo-ohhhhhhhng!]

The Kraken immediately perceived Artpe's presence, so it turned its head to look at him. At that moment, a fragment sent by Sienna embedded itself inside the Kraken's head before exploding. It had no choice, but to change direction again.

In the next moment, Artpe's several dozen Mana Strings took control of a falling temple fragment, and he threw it. It pierced through a tentacle. He couldn't borrow Sienna's Mana, but he could cause sufficient damage with just the temple fragments.

[Kweeeek, kwee-ooh-ahhhhh!]

The Kraken was being assaulted by troublesome attacks from both sides. The creature of the ocean felt as if it would pass away from the stress. Moreover, it had spread its ink to dominate the field, yet it was being sucked away into some unknown place!

“Maetel, I want you to increase your speed! Sienna, you are doing well! Keep attacking with the fragments!”

“It is easier said than done!”

However, she obediently followed Artpe’s words by increasing her speed. She made it look easy. Artpe followed after them, and he once again threw multiple fragments towards the back of the Kraken’s head. Then he used consecutive Blinks to arrive next to Maetel.

“Artpe, you better be prepared after this ends.”

“I did all of this to save both of you. Anyways, we have to change our tactic.”

Artpe took hold of Maetel with one hand, and he used his other hand to get ahold of Sienna. Maetel’s Acceleration was fast, but it was slower than Artpe’s Blink. He could travel a distance of several hundred meters with a single Blink. It was time for him to turn the table.

He gave orders to his party members as he used Blink to dodge the Kraken and the temple fragments.

“Roa! You should suck in everything you can! Ah, I want you to store the ink separately.”

[Nyaa-ahhhhh, nyaa nyaa-ahhh-nyaa!]

She grumbled that he was a very bad owner. However, Roa obediently followed his order. Then he gave orders to Maetel, who had passed the baton off to Artpe. She had nothing to do after he had shown up.

“Is it possible to share the power of Acceleration using Record Divide?”

“Ah... yes.”

They were in a desperate situation, yet there was a slight pause before Maetel gave her reply. It meant she felt guilty about something. As he had suspected, she had been sharing her Acceleration ability with her party members all along!

However, this wasn't something he should call her out on. He was thankful, since they were able to accomplish many things thanks to her sharing her ability with them. Artpe decided not to interrogate her.

"All right. While you share your Acceleration with Sienna, I want you to destroy any obstacles we can't dodge using your long sword's beam."

"Yes!"

The Kraken was either sending several dozen streams of waters or its tentacles. They were all being stopped by Artpe's barriers. Still, Artpe couldn't do several dozen tasks at once, so he decided to shift a portion of his burden to Maetel.

"Sienna, you are on offense. Your attack power will increase when you receive the Acceleration ability! I want you to hit only the biggest fragments!"

"I am confident, oppa!"

"Let's do this!"

He used consecutive Blinks to travel several hundred meters. One of the temple's pillars appeared right in front of them!

"Hoo-ahhhhhhp!"

Sienna used the Kraken's power and the power of vibration to strike the pillar with all her might. The pillar broke into several dozen fragments, and they were sent towards the Kraken, who had been chasing after them!

[Koo-goo-oh-ahhhhhhhh!]

[Nyaa! Nyaa nyaa-aht!]

Roa had absorbed all of its ink, so they no longer had to worry about dodging the lasers that had formed from all directions. That's right. When Artpe and Roa joined the fray, the Kraken was surprisingly ineffective in its attacks!

[Kyaa-hahhhhhh! Kee-oh-ahhhhhh!]

It couldn't kill the annoying heroes. It couldn't even catch up to them. It was being continuously pelted by the temple fragments, and its health was starting to approach a dangerous territory. Finally, the Kraken's anger reached a critical point!.

"Crazy!"

In that moment, the several dozen water lasers doubled then tripled. Then an overwhelming amount of ink was spouted from the Kraken. Even Roa would have a hard time eating such a large amount of ink. The Kraken used the ink to instantly dominate the surrounding ambient Mana. The Kraken's body was peppered with holes, and blood shot out from these critical injuries instead of water. It added to the speed of the Kraken's charge!

"Artpe, its gaining on us! We are really going to get caught!"

"Oppa, I don't see anymore good fragments I can use to attack it! At this rate we really..."

"We really will...!"

Artpe shouted.

"There's the exit! I want you to strike that!"

"Yes!"

Sienna obediently followed Artpe's words. After Sienna struck the ceiling, Artpe used one last Blink to exit the underground tunnel. Afterwards, a horrific earthquake shook the region. It sounded like a thunder storm. The underground tunnel collapsed accompanying an explosive roar!

[Koo-ooooh-ohhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!]

The Ancient Kraken let out a cry. However, its lasers nor its tentacles could chase after the party members.

The Ancient Kraken was buried alongside the temple and the underground tunnel.

Chapter 81

Is This Really Happening Again? (5)

[Koo-wahhhhhh! Kee-hahhhhhh!]

Did the scream of a damned soul from the depth of hell sound like this? The sound that made everyone, who heard the sound, shudder in fright rang throughout the ocean. The ocean floor shook as it crumbled. All the deep-sea organisms had already fled far away. It was the same for the monsters.

[The humans are here!]

[W... what the hell is in there!?]

[You guys haven't left yet?]

As all of this unfolded, an awful lot of merfolk had gathered at this location. Maybe, merfolks weren't really monsters. They might be another humanoid species. It seemed they were really poor at following directions. In that aspect, they were really like humans! Or maybe they were dumb. They might have forgotten his words in just two months!

Artpe would rather perish than become responsible for the merfolk. He had these thoughts as he let go of Maetel and Sienna. Since she knew this wasn't over yet, Maetel didn't complain too much. She quickly stepped away from him.

"Artpe, somehow we got this far, but... It isn't dead yet, right?"

"There is no way it would die just from that."

At the end, Sienna's strike had been a critical blow, and the Kraken had been buried deep beneath the ocean floor. Even though the Kraken was buried alive, the Kraken was continuing its rampage. He couldn't guarantee that the temple fragments and the rocks of the underwater tunnel would be able to withstand the Kraken's assault.

[Kwah-ohhhhhh!]

"Wow. Look at that. The ground is shifting."

They had somehow safely escaped the clutches of the monster. He let out a deep breath. First, he had smoothly reached this point. In the process of getting here, he had used much more Mana than he had expected, so he was having a hard time keeping his wits about him.

Maetel had indiscriminately used her Acceleration, and Sienna had attacked the Kraken by hitting the temple fragments. Artpe had used Blink. Most of their actions consumed Mana. This was probably easy to forget, but Artpe was maintaining the Underwater Breathing magic. It took constant consumption of Mana to maintain the spell.

The quantity of Mana possessed by Artpe was transcendent, and if he hadn't possessed it, he would have died. He would have died a dozen times over.

"Shit... I have to use that magic."

Artpe was drinking the highest grade Mana Potion he had purchased from Mycenae. However, the potion's effect didn't kick in immediately. It would be a long time before his Mana filled up to the point he desired.

The Kraken will probably escape before his Mana filled back up. Artpe's party and the long history of the Anaid Kingdom would come to an end! Artpe drank all his Mana Potions, and he desperately gathered the ambient Mana around him. At the same time, he put his brain to work.

'Mana. The Mana is a must...'

Demite's Gemstone... He could use it if needed, but it wasn't enough. He could drink multiple Mana Potions, but the efficacy of the potion would be close to nil now.

Yes, there was the Kraken's Magic Stone!

If he consumed that item, he might be able to pull this off!

However, it wouldn't be enough. Artpe's eyes could clearly see the status of the buried Kraken. As if to confirm that he couldn't kill it, the damn Kraken moved in a very lively manner!

The only reason why it couldn't escape its prison was the residual holy power left within the temple fragments. Once the Kraken's demonic energy pushed away the holy power, its violent rampage would overturn the entire region.

At that moment, Artpe suddenly had a thought.

"Maetel, what is the range of application for the Record Divide?"

"My comrades and... Those that are far weaker than me."

"What about the merfolk over there?"

Maetel watched the merfolk, who were starting to congregate around the party. After thinking over it for a brief moment, she nodded her head without hesitation.

"I believe I can do it. It will be hard if I don't have consent to take their Mana."

"All right. Wait a moment."

Basically, it wasn't impossible. It was just hard to do. This fact terrified him. A hero normally took and commandeered resources from innocent people. So he didn't feel much guilt in doing this. Artpe immediately turned towards the merfolk, and he shouted at them.

[All of you guys come over here! I want to use your Mana!]

[M... mana!? Human, how can you use our Mana...]

[Does this human share the same purpose as that man? He might be trying to experiment on us! You are a diabolical human!]

It seemed he wouldn't be able to accomplish this through an amiable conversation. Artpe was resigned as he was about to use a more coercive measure. However, a voice containing an iron will rang out from beyond the crowd of merfolk.

[That man is my owner. Soon, he will be the owner of this kingdom! All the merfolk shall follow his orders!]

It was Sherry's voice. She held a position of leadership amongst the merfolk, yet she had remained in this place. Artpe was taken aback by her appearance, and his mouth

fell open when he saw the thousands of merfolk following behind her.

They had willingly cut off their own escape route. How foolish can they be! However, the merfolk thought differently from Artpe. There wasn't a hint of hesitancy within Sherry's voice.

[Master will soon become the kingdom. If the master dies, the kingdom will not exist! You should think of it that way! Anyone with a drop of Mana left shall follow his order!]

[Princess. No, her majesty the queen...]

[The queen has spoken!]

There were those that were disgruntled by the situation. There were those that were uneasy about all of this. However, the merfolk didn't show any outward signs of their emotions. They obediently followed their queen's orders. They put their lives in Artpe's hands. Maetel's green eyes twinkled when she saw this.

"It is possible!"

"It is a skill that hasn't been Reinforced yet, but it is capable of... All right. Let's do this right now! I want you all to send as much of your Mana towards me!"

Artpe activated the Mana Link with Maetel. Maetel used the Record Divide to gather the Mana from the nearby merfolk. Artpe pulled the Mana towards him, and he activated his magic!

"Sienna, do you need Mana? Shall I share some with you?"

"Yes, oppa. If we kill that, I know I'll level up. I'll fight until I'm close to death!"

"Our Sienna had grown up to be really strong..."

It hurt him to see it, but that didn't mean he would refuse her the access to the Mana. Artpe gritted his teeth, and he took out the Demite's Gemstone.

He had used this item at every important junctures, but the item still remained in its rough gemstone form. When he successfully ended this battle, Artpe thought he would be able to refine it...

“Please last through this battle. I’ll soon bring out your true form...!”

The Mana from the merfolk went through Maetel. Then the Mana was passed onto him. He poured it all into the Demite’s Stone. At the same time, he started chanting the great magic spell.

“The mystery that fell from the sky. The cradle of creation. We are nestled in your bosom, and I will lead you by my hand. Accede to my demand. Wash away those that sully your purity. Maintain your mysteries.”

Each words brought forth a blinding purple light, and it amplified the Mana.

If he could see it with his eyes, it was within the range of the great magic. He created a magic circle with the amplified Mana. He expanded the circle, then he set the range. Just this act created a pressure that made the ground shake.

“I will become your proxy. Entrust your power to me. Germinate the power of life. Turn yourself around. Become the mace of death that destroys my enemy.”

“Oh my. He is too cool...!”

This was the first time Maetel had seen Artpe use a great magic spell. Her eyes twinkled. Artpe could only let out a bitter laugh when he heard her words. He already knew the result of this magic spell.

[Koo-goo-ohhhhhhhhhhhhh!]

As Artpe was getting closer to finishing his spell, the Kraken felt a sense of danger. Its rampage became fiercer. This finally caused a part of the ground to give way, and the Kraken shot a stream of water towards Artpe!

“No, you don’t!”

Artpe was chanting his magic, and Maetel was using her Record Divide. Sienna stepped forward in their stead. She took center stage. She focused the hammer’s power of vibration, and she brought down a fierce swing towards the stream of water. The attack was neutralized accompanying a loud boom.

Somehow, she was able to block its attack, but it hadn’t been a simple attack. Afterwards, several strands of water streams erupted as they completely dismantled

the surface of the ground. An enormous tentacle erupted from the newly created space!

[Koo-ahhhhhhhhhh!]

[The bastard's tentacle came out!]

[H... human! You took our Mana, so you should do something! Please show us something!]

The merfolk started speaking in a respectful tone when their lives became threatened.

Artpe snorted. He smiled as he spoke the final part of the spell. At the end, he mixed Sienna's special Mana, which was antagonistic against demonic energy. He poured it into the Demite's Gemstone. Then he once again pushed the magical energy towards the core of the magic circle!

“Oh ocean. Show us your anger! Wash away the filth, and prove your purity!”

The activation of the spell was impending, so he took out the level 267 Kraken's magic stone. He had no choice. He had to let this magic stone go, and the waste almost brought tears to his eyes. However, this was a necessary sacrifice to kill the damn monster once and for all.

Artpe knew what choices and sacrifices he had to make for his survival. He knew this better than anyone else, since he had been the weakest of the Four Heavenly Kings in his past life!

“Shit... Flow downwards! God Flush!”

Artpe broke the magical stone, which had come out from a Kraken, with all his might. He used the magical energy to activate the magic circle to its peak, and he uttered the final words to the spell.

God Flush was a great magic spell that was left behind by the Kraken. It had been the owner of this magic stone. Moreover, the target of this attack was another Kraken. It was a truly funny and ironic situation. However, the result wasn't funny at all.

[Koo-oooh!? Koo-ooh-ohhhhhhhhhhhh!]

The tentacle had been freed into the ocean water, and it had been trying to find a target. However, the tentacle suddenly stopped moving. An unnatural silence descended on the battlefield. Everyone became puzzled by the silence. He had consumed such an overwhelming amount of Mana to use this spell, yet the result was silence.

“Artpe, what did you just...”

“Maetel, I want you to hold me.”

Maetel squashed her own question, and she spoke in a reliable manner towards Artpe.

“Yes!”

“Me too!”

[Nyaa nyaa-ahhhhhhht!]

In regards to anything that had to do with skinship, she would never turn it down. She didn't even ask him any questions. When she heard his word, she hugged him. As if she didn't want to lose, Sienna also hugged Artpe. Roa was stuck between them, and she yowled as if she was about to be crushed to death. Afterwards, the ocean water sloshed.

“It is about to start.”

Artpe mumbled quietly to himself, and he shut his eyes tight.

One didn't need to ask what was about to start. The silence from a moment ago felt like a lie. The torrent of water struck the region!

“Kyahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhk!”

“Artpehhhhhhhhhhhhhh!”

[Nyaaaaaaaaaaaht!]

It was an enormous whirlpool. A whirlpool had erupted in the middle of the ocean. It was created by sucking in everything that made up the ocean. The whirlpool dragged everything downwards towards the ocean bed. Artpe's party had to struggle to get out

of the helical flow of the water.

[Koo-ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!]

Of course, the terminal end of the whirlpool landed on the Kraken.

[Kah-hah! Koo-hahhhhhk! Kee-ehhhhhh!]

The enormous vortex dragged down the ocean water. It was powerful enough to pulverize the enormous temple fragments. It freed the Kraken for an instant, but in the next moment, it was swept alongside the pulverized remnants of the temple fragments. The frightening centrifugal current caused enormous wounds to form on the Kraken's body!

[M... my god. The god of the ocean is angry!]

[H... he isn't human. He is the god of the ocean! He has descended to save us!]

It was as if the enormous whirlpool was punishing the Kraken. When the merfolk saw him control the ocean, they mistook Artpe for the god of the ocean. In truth, it wasn't an overreaction to call him a god based on what he did!

[Ggooh-ahhhhhhhhh!]

"As expected, a level one spell comes out like this when using a magic stone... Shit!"

"Kyahhhhhhh!"

"You sneaked a kiss on my cheek. Ooh-gyahhhhhk!"

It wasn't just a kiss on the cheek. Maetel acted as if she couldn't win against the current of the whirlpool, and she kept pushing her mouth towards his face. It seemed Sienna was quick to pick up on Maetel's bad behavior. She also joined in!

Artpe was currently hanging onto his party members. If not, he would be swept away by the great magic God Flush. Is this what you reap what you sow meant? He could only moan in a low voice as the hero and the Warrior Priestess displayed their physical affection all over his body.

[Kee-heeeeeek! Kee-hahhhhhh!]

The scream of the Kraken was getting louder and louder.

The Kraken's body was being assaulted. It was being sucked below to the ocean floor by the pressure. Moreover, Sienna's holy power was layered on top of the attack. The pieces of the pulverized temple fragments dug into its body like needles.

The blue ocean churned with its black blood. Soon, it was as if the entire ocean was dyed black. Artpe thought about ordering Roa to absorb everything.

How long did it last? The whirlpool had started below the surface of the water, and it had dragged the Kraken towards the absolute floor of the ocean. As the whirlpool continued to travel downwards, everyone became free from the influence of the current created by the whirlpool. They could no longer hear the screams of the Kraken, and they could no longer see its tentacles. It had been completely swallowed by the ocean.

As if Maetel was finally satisfied, she let go of Artpe, and she asked him a question.

"Artpe, what happens if that monster doesn't die from this?"

"That is a very good question."

Artpe smirked as he answered her.

"We have to kill it no matter what."

Chapter 82

Is This Really Happening Again? (6)

At that moment, the residents of the ocean was holding their breath. A spectacular and frightening whirlpool had dragged the Kraken down to the ocean floor, and it was as if the scream of the Kraken was still ringing in their ears. No one thought this horrible monster could be killed. The merfolk had seen its writhing tentacles, and Artpe's party had seen the entire body go down. Artpe had confirmed its death, yet he continued to look warily towards the ocean bed. He gripped his weapon tight.

“...”

[...]

“...”

[...]

However, the Kraken didn't show up no matter how long they waited. The silence lengthened indefinitely until Artpe's party broke it.

“Ooh-goo-ahhhhhhhhhh.”

“That's right! It's a level up! My head huuuuuuurts!”

“Koohk.”

When the Ancient Kraken lost its life, the EXP came pouring in! It was divided amongst the party members. Basically, this was the surest proof that the Ancient Kraken had died.

The problem was the fact that the EXP of the level 291 Ancient Kraken was being shared amongst the three of them, and they were writhing around in pain. It was as if they were dancing.

“Hoo-goo-goohk! Artpe! Why does our level up always have to be so painful!?”

"It's because we always fight insanely high leveled opponents! Normally... This is supposed to happen once in a lifetime!"

"Heeeeng. Oaaaaaaa!"

While they were dancing, Maetel ascended to level 261. Artpe earned a little bit more EXP than her, so he was at level 263. Sienna had contributed to the battle just as much as them, so her level climbed steeply to 247.

Their skills also went through a similar growth. This was especially true for the great magic called God Flush. There weren't many situations where one would use such a spell, yet he had used it to finish off the Kraken. It increased to level 5 in one go.

Of course, level and skill made up the foundation of his existence, and both of them had grown. This was why Artpe suffered under a bigger headache. It was a trivial problem... No, it was pretty annoying.

"Ooh-goo-goohk, it hurts...!"

[B... be careful of the humans. They are acting strange!]

The merfolk became wary. They thought the humans might be suffering under the curse of madness. However, they didn't attack Artpe's party. Instead, it didn't take long for them to writhe in pain like the humans.

[Wait a moment. My body is... Something is wrong... Koo-hahk!?]

[Ooh-ahhhhhhkh!]

[It hurts! My head hurts so much!]

The merfolk hadn't been able to directly harm the Ancient Kraken. However, there was a very simple reason why they were going through this development.

Maetel had gathered their Mana. They had contributed in the extermination of the Ancient Kraken. A very small portion of the Ancient Kraken's massive Record was given to them.

[My body... My scales!]

[I'm dying! I'm dying!]

They had received an extremely small amount of EXP compared to Artpe's party. However, the average level of the merfolk were below level 100. This was why the EXP was considered to be an overwhelming amount. Soon, many merfolk were growing by at least 10 levels.

Moreover, there were those credited with more achievement than other. This allowed these merfolk to evolve into a higher rank!

[M... master! My body... Something is wrong! Koo-hahk!?]

Of all the stupid things, there was one that was evolving in the wrong direction. It was the queen of the Merfolk Sherryl Anaid. She had made a promise to serve Artpe as her master.

[Koohk... Koo-ahhhhhh!]

By this time, everyone was in a celebratory mood. Sherryl was the only one amongst them letting a horrible scream. It felt as if her high pitch scream would rupture his eardrums. He frowned as he turned to look at her.

However, his expression quickly changed in the next moment. It would have been better if she was being a crybaby. She was the only one greeted with calamity in this happy occasion!

[Why are you... Damn it!?]

When the Ancient Kraken was assaulted by God Flush, it had let out a copious amount of cursed blood into the ocean water. Currently, Sherryl's body was letting out a light, and her body was sucking in all the blood. Her body, mind, soul and magical energy was being dyed by the demonic gene. She was evolving in a direction she should not proceed!

"That's right. Sherryl is the only one amongst the merfolk that survived the demonification experiment...! Maybe, one of her ancestors was an Ancient Mermaid! Shit!"

His growth caused his head to hurt. He gripped his head as he quickly rushed towards Sherryl. Roa quickly opened her mouth to suck in the Kraken's Blood, but most of the

blood had already flowed into Sherryl!

"Roa, we have no choice. We'll have to extract the demonic gene that is already in her."

[Nyaa-ah, nyaa nyaa-ah!]

[Koohk. Ggooh-ahhhhhh!]

In the past, Sherryl had experienced receiving the demonification curse. This was why the her change was advancing really fast. His eyes couldn't keep up with it. On the other hand, she was originally a mermaid. It should be possible to extract demonic gene! At the very least, she wouldn't die!

"I... I'll help!"

"Thank you. I want you to stick close to her!"

Sienna was also suffering through pain caused by leveling up all at once. She scrunched up her face as she followed after him. First, Artpe was going to use Roa to extract the demonic gene. Then Sienna would inject her Mana into Sherryl. At the same time, he would take direct control of the Mana, and he would coat Sherryl's body with the Mana.

[Ggrrr-oooooooh. M... master.]

[This is why I told you not to come here... You are unlucky.]

[You didn't come out for over two month. I was worried... Koo-hahk!]

She needlessly follow after him, but it was also true that he would have had a hard time using the God Flush at the crucial moment in battle without the merfolk. This was why he couldn't berate her. Artpe sighed as he observed her insides.

He had succeeded in pulling off this procedure with Sienna, but he couldn't underestimate the task in front of him. Sherryl was a mermaid. The structure of her Mana was markedly different from a human. Moreover, the demonic gene that had invaded her body was different from the demonic gene from a pure Demon.

'I can see why the Demons aimed for this temple. Shit...'

The demonic gene had invaded her entire body, and somehow the demonic energy within her body was more potent than the one within a Demon. It was more pure. The demonic gene had found a new and qualified owner. It improved her body and magical energy to new heights. However, as a price, she was being dyed with pure evil. Roa had her mouth open as she tried to suck it in. However, the demonic gene was tenacious. It resisted the extraction.

[Koo-ha-ahk. M... master!]

[Endure it.]

He knew the mana structure of the Ancient Mermaid and the Ancient Kraken. However, his knowledge was still lacking. Something was missing. He churned his brain to find another hint, and he suddenly had an epiphany.

“The Grimoire!”

He quickly took out the Grimoire he took from the Demon Teana. He opened it. The Grimoire was bound with black leather, and the magical energy within it was incredible. This was why the water pressure couldn’t damage it, and the Grimoire didn’t get wet.

[Ggooh-ahhhhhhhhk!]

When the Grimoire was brought outside, the Mana dominating Sherryl’s body displayed a strong reaction. How could it not? The cause and the effect didn’t match up, but Sherryl was heading towards the ultimate goal sought by the Grimoire!

If he let the two resonate with each other, Sherryl would be born-again as a powerful entity. Of course, Artpe wouldn’t stand by and let that happen.

“You are merely a book. You don’t get to assert yourself. I am your owner!”

Artpe pored over the grimoire. He read the passages, and he controlled the Mana in the exact opposite manner described. His purple Mana clashed with the black Mana of the book.

The Grimoire’s Record and will was truly impressive. It didn’t approve of its new owner’s disposition, so it resisted fiercely. However, Artpe had grown once again after killing the Ancient Kraken. Surprisingly, the black Mana could no longer put up a fight

against him, and it started to move according to Artpe's will!

[Koo-hahhhhhh!]

[Don't let go of your consciousness. Endure it! If you die, it'll be the end of this kingdom!]

He continuously spoke to Sherryl like he had done with Sienna. He desperately held onto the Grimoire as he controlled the Mana. He wasn't aiming for the Ancient Merfolk, Ancient Kraken or the Demon race. He was trying to create a new path for her.

'The structure of Mana for a mermaid... What was the Mana structure for a mermaid? Shit. I know it, yet it doesn't move the way I want it to...! This is much harder than what I did with Sienna!'

[Nyaaaaaaaaah!]

"Koohk. We can't allow it to shift back!"

Roa and Sienna was also fighting desperately next to Artpe. Roa was trying to extract as much demonic gene as possible. Sienna erased the trace left behind by the demonic gene, and she used her power to recover Sherryl's body! Thanks to their efforts, Sherryl's change had slowed down.

[Koohk. Koo-hoo-ahhhhhh!]

[Eeek. Shit... You said you are the queen of the merfolk! Hey!]

[Koo-hahk!]

In truth, she was in a much better spot compared to what Sienna had went through. The only problem right now was the fact that Sherryl was mentally weaker than Sienna by a significant amount.

If she had a strong grasp over her consciousness, he would have guided her like he had done with Sienna. She would have been able to direct the Mana within her body.

However, a fundamental change had occurred within Sherryl's body and mind. The shock had made her lose consciousness. It really highlighted how mentally strong Sienna was. However, he was dealing with Sherryl right now!

[Ggoo-hooooooohk!]

[You idiot... You said I shouldn't tarnish the pledge made by a mermaid. However, you are the one tarnishing it right now!]

[...hahk!?]

Artpe had been prattling on as he said all sorts of things. Surprisingly, Sherryl's eyes flew open, and she regained consciousness. Artpe was dumbfounded rather than being happy at the sight.

'What the hell is up with this pledge!'

[Master. I cannot inconvenience my master...!]

After regaining consciousness, she desperately grasped at her Mana. Her Mana had ignored the will of its owner up until now. It had gone on a rampage as it changed her body. However, she was able to briefly stop the progress of her Mana. Artpe seized the opportunity. He took hold of her Mana, and he led it down a new path.

Of course, he had no idea where where this new path was. However, he knew the wrong answers. When he eliminated all the wrong paths, he was left with one!

[Master...!]

[Just shut up and follow my lead!... it's done!]

There had been a tug of war within Sherryl's body over the flow of her Mana. In the end, Artpe was the winner.

The black grimoire worked according to Artpe's will, so it was letting out Mana that was dyed purple. According to the guidance of his Mana, Sherryl's Mana structure went through incremental changes. Slowly, it changed according to Artpe's will.

"Oppa!"

"Do it right now. I want you to give her the strongest blessing you can give!"

"Understood!"

[Nyaaaaah!]

Roa and Sienna also used the last spurt of their powers, and they extracted the demonic gene from Sherryl's body. Artpe pushed out all the impurities, and he filled up her circuit with only her Mana. Then he slowly withdrew his own Mana. Sherryl also recognized his will, so she desperately tried to harmonize her mind and body.

[Hoo-ooh... Ha-ahhhhhhhh!]

The last of the demonic gene was expelled from Sherryl's body. Unlike before, her body was emitting a radiant light.

[Ah ah. Ahhhhhh!]

“I think we succeeded, but... Be ready.”

“Yes. Please...!”

[Nyaa-ahhhh.]

Artpe glared fiercely as he readied himself if things got ugly. However, the light slowly faded away, and Sherryl slowly walked out of the light. He got a complete assessment regarding her status through his Read All Creation ability. He couldn't help but laugh.

‘What the hell? Is this really happening again!?’

[Sherryl Anaid]

[Genesis Mermaid]

[Mermaid Queen]

[Level : 139]

How the hell do they come up with the name of these races?! Artpe took a step back as he tried hard not to laugh. As if she had been waiting for him to move, Sherryl took

a step forward.

[Master... I give my thanks to you. Also, subjects of my kingdom...]

After suffering through enormous pain, she had found the right direction as she evolved. Her deep blue eyes were much mature than before. She looked at her surrounding. It was as if everyone was looking at her. The merfolk were all facing her, and they were taken aback.

[My god... The very first mermaid recorded in our kingdom's history is here!]

[M... my queen...!]

All the merfolk recognized Sherryl's form, and they all bowed their heads. Artpe wasn't sure what was going on, but it seemed these fishes had another ancestral line besides the Ancient Mermaid. After coming to this conclusion, he turned around.

In truth, it didn't matter if Sherryl had become a Genesis Mermaid or a Chaos Mermaid. He just had to make sure she didn't suffer the fate of the Ancient Mermaid.

His party and the merfolk had finished their level up. Moreover, Sherryl had evolved without any trouble.

The most important thing right now was the looting of the Ancient Kraken.

Chapter 83

Is This Really Happening Again? (7)

The members of the hero's party stood side by side as they looked down at the underwater stone grave. It had been a complete collapse, and the corpse of the defeated Ancient Kraken remained within this grave. Yes, it was deep within.

Maetel opened her mouth...

"Artpe, I'm curious about one thing"

"What are you doing with your hand? Recently, you always seem to grab me before I even ask anything of you."

"No way. I would never do that."

Maetel retracted the hand she had been sneakily extending towards him. She asked him a question.

"The Kraken is buried deep within the ocean, so how do we take it out and loot it?"

"I'm thinking about using the great magic spell again... are you disappointed?"

"Piii. I hate you, Artpe."

It was a grave mistake to think that Artpe would always be slow to come up with an answer. As more time passed, Maetel was starting to come after Artpe in a direct and open manner. He wouldn't easily give ground to Maetel!

'Now that I think about it she is 14 years old. Is it her puberty? In the past, I could just grab her hand, and she would smile all day... '

She gradually wanted more and more from him. It seemed she was spooked when she saw women like Mycenae and Etna loiter around Artpe's vicinity. She became persistent in trying to seal the deal. Artpe didn't want to complicate his life any further, but if things progressed well like this...

'... I guess that won't be too bad. Huht!?'

In a flash, the mere fact that he was having such a thought made him want to bash his own head in with a hammer. He quickly turned around. He could confirm where the Kraken was buried, so he just had to use his magic spell.

However, before he could do that...

[I want you guys to head back first.]

[We'll wait until master's work is done. We'll return together.]

[When the buried Ancient Kraken is brought out, its Demonic gene will overtake all of you. If you want to see the merfolk suffer the same pain as you, do you as you please...]

[If I'm being truthful, I prefer that outcome by a large margin.]

Sherryl replied with a strong voice. He hadn't noticed it before, but after the light surrounding her disappeared, a small gem-like crystal letting out purple light had appeared on her forehead. It created an additional aura of mystery around her.

[I know what was done before was wrong, but I'm sure this is the primal source of energy. If master can share the demonic energy with me, I can adjust the energy, and I can lead my people down the right path. Master instructed me by showing me the right path. I'll depart this knowledge to my people.]

[...]

A deep purple light was being emitted from the forehead gem when Sherryl proclaimed her unequivocal commitment. This was accompanied by new information being displayed in Artpe's eyes.

[Sherryl Anaid]

[Genesis Mermaid]

[Mermaid Queen]

[Level : 139]

[Innate Ability : Race Command]

“Ha.”

He never expected to see a day when a mermaid would awaken to an Innate Ability. He didn't reincarnate for nothing. Artpe burst out in laughter when he saw something he never expected to see.

One couldn't develop Innate Ability just because one was strong. It didn't matter if one was wise. It also wasn't an ability one could gain, because one was born from a good bloodline. Talent, experience, luck and Record must all be in harmony for one to have a chance of developing an Innate Ability.

Moreover, her Innate Ability was called Race Command. It was a terrifying ability. If a human with this ability had shown up, he would probably be able to newly write history by creating a unified empire.

Artpe once again had a hunch that he had caused this trouble. This situation might progress into something enormous. It couldn't be compared to the time when he had saved Sienna.

‘If she is able to advance the other merfolk without a hitch... No one will be able to ignore them just because they are merfolk. This is turning interesting.’

Yes, it was true that a variable had shown up on the Demon King's side. There would be no downside if one or two variables appeared on his side. He put on a fairly confident expression, and he willingly accepted the request made by his first familiar.

[All right. I want you to take this as far as you can. However, if it turns out weird like the Ancient Mermaids, I'll personally end them.]

[I won't let master lift a finger. If that happens, I'll kill them myself.]

[You are good at talking.]

Artpe snorted as he once again turned towards where the Kraken was buried. He put away the grimoire, which had fulfilled its role. He didn't take out the Demite's Gemstone either. He just raised his hand, and he set a similar magical circle like before.

When she saw this, Sienna tilted her head in confusion. She queried Artpe.

"Oppa, you gathered an incredible amount of Mana before... Even if you've leveled up, are you sure you have enough? Shall I lend you my Mana?"

Despite Sienna's worry, he just pointed towards the location in front of him with a smirk on his face. It was the location where he had activated the great magic.

He had activated a great magic called God Flush to end the Kraken, and the traces of the magic circle still remained there. Of course, it could only be seen by people like Artpe and Sienna, who possessed supreme gift in dealing with Mana.

"There is an advantage in using magic through a magic circle. This is especially true when the Mana is undisturbed. When one uses the same spell in the same location, the Mana consumption drops below half compared to before."

"I see... Then we should be careful in locations where our enemies created a magic circle?"

"No, you can use your unique Mana to disrupt the Mana flow. You can erase the magic circle. I'll explain in more detail later."

"Yes!"

In the past, Maetel had shown an instinctive ability to do this very thing. She had taken control of the surrounding magic, so no other magic could be activated near her. However, he didn't expect Sienna to possess such genius talent. The fact that there were already two heroes was already causing him a headache.

"So... The mystery that fell from the sky. The cradle of creation."

After he finished giving the short magic lesson, he started chanting the magic spell. It was the exact same incantation he had used against the Kraken! Matel belatedly tried to stop him.

"Wait a moment. If you create another whirlpool, wouldn't it bury the corpse further? Wouldn't it be harder for us to take it out!?"

"No. This magic spell has two patterns for activation."

The first was a downward flush. What was the second pattern?

Maetel easily figured out the answer to his question.

“It surges upwards...?”

“That’s it! Flow backward, God Flush!”

In a flash, the magic circle let out a brilliant light. In the next moment, a silence that had been observed once before descended on the party. However, Artpe’s party had experienced this magic once before. They knew it was the silence before the storm. He didn’t say anything, yet Maetel and Sienna clung to him.

Then the spell arrived.

“Kyahhhhhhhhk!”

“It’s gushing! The rocks are soaring upwards!”

Water sprang up from a place deeper than the ocean floor. The surging water crushed the pile of stones into dust, and the dust covered the entire region.

Of course, Artpe had already expected this to happen, so he protected his party with a barrier he prepared beforehand. This God Flush was being used to bring out the corpse of the Kraken. He didn’t need to invest too much Mana into this spell. This was why he had plenty of Mana left to create a barrier.

[I... it is coming out.]

[Huge... It is too large...]

[How dreadful. Is that really its corpse? Is it really dead?]

Soon, the Kraken’s corpse appeared alongside the surging water and rocks. Since it had been infused with Demonic energy, it had been thoroughly beaten with holy power. It was also swept up in the surge water after being flushed down before. Its corpse was in tatters. It was in worse condition than the Kraken that had been beaten to death by the Hellfire Sentinel.

“Is it because it was sealed away for a long time? Wow. Its body was completely

destroyed."

"What are you going to do with it, Artpe?"

"It is something you like the most"

At Artpe's words, Maetel's eyes gleamed.

"I can eat it!?"

"Yes."

Artpe solemnly nodded his head as he answered her.

"I'll make it so that you'll never be able to eat a normal octopus again."

"It'll probably take us about 100 years to eat it all..."

[Nyaaaaa.]

Artpe's party earnestly talked about the meals they would have during their travels. While they were doing so, Sherryl had gathered the merfolk in one location. She chose merfolk with potential and qualification.

[I ask this of the merfolk that had advanced from the previous battle. Are you ready to return to your primal form?]

[Queen... We are willing!]

[Her majesty have already walked the path. We will willingly follow in your footsteps!]

Candidates were selected in short order. When she nodded her head, the rest of the merfolk moved to the back. She extended one hand. All the demonic energy that was flowing out into the ocean waters were gathered towards her.

Sherryl wasn't the Greed Beast Roa, yet she was able to control the demonic energy. She possessed an Innate ability called Race Command, and there were abilities that came from being a Genesis Mermaid. It would have been impossible for her to do this if not for these conditions.

[At the end of your pain, I'll be waiting for all of you. We will return to a form that we were unable to regain for a very long time. My master revived this Record, and it is our duty to propagate it.]

[Ggooh-ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!]

[Koo-hahhhhhhhhk!]

When the demonic energy flowed into their bodies, the merfolk let out horrible screams as they writhed. The result was the same as Sherryl from before. However, a bright light was emitted from Sherryl's forehead gem, and she was able to freely control the demonic energy that had settled within their body.

[Oh primal energy. Guide those that obey me through the right path!]

Of course, Artpe didn't care if the merfolk were starting a new mythos. He started looting the Ancient Kraken in earnest. The first thing he had to do was put away the broken altar.

"The Kraken, temple fragments and altar fragments are all gathered in one place. All right. Let's go!"

"Aht! I saw that before in sunbae-nim's Dungeon!"

"You are really late in noticing it."

Originally, the altar was supposed to suck in all the Mana and Record making up the temple. It was supposed to impart the Mana and Record into the Skill book and Spell book. However, Artpe had unintentionally broken the altar first. If he wasn't careful, the altar would lose its significance. He won't be able to use the Skill Book and Spell Book.

"However, I'm already well acquainted with the Mana patterns of sunbae-nim's magic spells. I'll be able to reverse engineer it with no problems...!"

"I can feel the Mana being concentrated within the altar... Yes, I see. That is why the temple fell."

Artpe didn't respond to Maetel's words. He grinned as he placed both hands on the altar, and he concentrated. When the temple fell, the Mana couldn't find its owner. It

rampaged as it spread into the surrounding. However, the Mana was starting to gather within the altar at Artpe's guidance!

That wasn't the end. The Mana and Record were sucked out from the Kraken's corpse and the temple fragments. It was all absorbed into the Skill book and Spell book.

How long had it been since he started to pull the Mana from his surrounding? All the light within the surrounding dimmed a little bit. As a result, the brilliant light around the Spell book and Skill book became apparent. The reward he could earn from the Kraken decreased by a little bit, but it was a small price to pay for strengthening their skills.

"It's done. Grab it, Maetel."

"It feels as if Artpe is feeding me... I wish it was the reverse."

The Skill book had the ability to strengthen Maetel's Record Divide. The Spell book had the ability to strengthen Artpe's Mana String. He had been using the cheat-like spell as his main spell up until now. He felt a flutter at the prospect of his spell being strengthened. The Spell book was absorbed into his body, and he waited for a change...

For some reason, the change never came to him.

"Huh. Did it fail?"

"It's all right, Artpe. We've been succeeding at everything up until now. It is ok to fail once."

"Thank you for consoling me, but there is no way this should have failed... Huh?"

He checked with his Read All Creation ability, but he couldn't find anything wrong. There had been too much change within him, so it was hard for him to figure out what had gone wrong in the middle. Artpe felt very leery about the situation, but Maetel didn't make any fuss about it. Therefore, he decided to overlook it for now.

"Shit... I'll be sure to get my revenge against that sunbae bastard."

"Sunbae-nim probably never expected the altar to be pulled out in the middle of the process."

He had a dirty feeling. It was as if he hadn't brushed his teeth.

Artpe destroyed the altar, which was of no use to him now. Then he started to loot the Kraken.

It was funny, but the loot that popped out was exactly four in number. One particular item caught his eyes.

"Level 291 Boss monster's magic stone..."

He had consumed the level 267 monster's magic stone already. This acquisition soothed his heart.

Somehow, he couldn't erase the thought that this was a zero-sum game, but this item's level was much higher. He would be able to put it to better use. He firmed his resolve. He would Reinforce the Artifacts with it. He put the magic stone away.

When he looked over the rest of the loot, he found a black bastard sword, a black helmet, and an enormous tower shield, which gave off a bad feeling with its uneven surface. They were all made out of a black metal.

"We did our best to hunt down a strong monster, yet there is nothing here that Artpe can use."

For some reason, Maetel looked dejected. Artpe smirked as he stroked her head.

"The fact that our vanguard gets stronger means the probability of us winning in a battle increases. So don't worry about it. You'll be able to swap out your bastard sword now."

She switched between a bastard sword and a long sword depending on the situation. She had been swinging this particular bastard sword since she was 12 years old. No matter how much he Reinforced it, there was a limit to its function based on the item's basic stat. She was able to acquire an absurdly reliable weapon here.

"Yes. I will protect Artpe with this sword."

"Sp I have to use this helmet and shield?"

"It might be a bit stuffy, but this is for your safety. There will also be less men bothering

you, since they won't be able to see your beauty."

"Oppa, it is embarrassing if you say stuff like that."

Sienna behaved herself as she blushed. She took pleasure in his compliment. Maetel used to be like this...

"Ah. There is something we have to do before you guys can take it."

Roa had been obediently held in Artpe's bosom as she missed out on the appetizing demonic energy of the Kraken. She had been grinding her teeth at the lost opportunity. He brought her forward, and he ordered her with a stern voice.

"I want you to suck out all the curse within the Artifacts. What a nasty piece of work. It placed traps on the Artifacts even in its death."

[Nyaa-ah, nyaa nyaa-ah nyaa.]

She said she would be satisfied for now. Roa gave a coy reply as she opened her mouth. All the curse was sucked into her mouth. The only thing left were artifacts that had turned pure-white.

"That thick darkness was all cursed Mana!?"

"My shield turned pretty!"

Artpe smirked when he saw that his party members loved the Artifacts they received. After divvying up the loot, he turned around. Sherryl had done well. She had been successful in leading the merfolk towards being a primal race. A mature aura like the one surround Sherryl emanated from the newly born merfolk

He had no idea if the merfolk would sink completely. Maybe, they might float to the top by taking advantage of this new possibility... At the very least, he was sure that Sherryl Anaid would stand center in the middle of history. At this fact, he felt an emotion that was hard to pin down. He let out a sigh.

He had acquired a lot of things, but it truly was time for them to leave towards Aedia.

Chapter 84

A Wrong Encounter (1)

[Master, you are the one that told me to keep to my oath.]

[I don't remember giving such orders. My personal assistant did it.]

[Master, you don't have a personal assistant. I'll become master's personal assistant!]

His party had completely erased the dark cloud hanging over the mermaid kingdom of Anaid. On top of that, they had caught two Krakens. They even gained Achievement he hadn't wanted to accomplish.

He was about to shrug everything off as his party left for Aedia. However, there was one obstacle left. After all the disturbance subsided, Sherryl Anaid had received the support of all the merfolk to be queen. She was the Genesis Mermaid Queen.

[The favor I received from master was indescribably large. You hadn't just saved my life. You revived the glory of the merfolk, which had been long forgotten. You guided me... That is why I am going to throw everything away. It is my turn to follow you, master!]

[What about the merfolk? You did your best to turn over a new leaf for your people.]

Sherryl's Innate ability and the demonic energy of the Kraken were used splendidly to create more Genesis Mermaids and Mermen. He gestured towards the new elite troops as he spoke.

[You don't have to worry about them.]

Sherryl pounded her chest as if that would be of no problem. Her breasts jiggled so much that Artpe was getting distracted. He wanted to ask her to stop, but if he spoke those words, he had no idea what kind of punishment he would receive from Maetel.

[They were reborn as primal merfolk. They can rule supreme in this ocean, and they will be able to improve. I will stay by master's side, and I will assist you. It doesn't

matter if it is day or night. I will give my body and mind all to you!]

[I don't need your mind, and I really don't need your body...]

At Artpe's rejection, tears started to fall from her large eyes. Purple light flashed from her forehead gem, and at the same time, she yelled out.

[In truth, I need you, master!]

[Damn it.]

He had noticed this when he guided Sienna to become the Evil Reflector. In the process of becoming a new race, Sienna and Sherryl seemed to have developed a sense of loyalty and awe towards him.

The proof was seen in the merfolk. Sherryl clung to Artpe, and in a similar manner, the merfolk were clinging to their queen!

[You can't, my queen! Please stay with us and lead us!]

[We cannot lose your highness!]

[That human... I am fully aware that our kingdom has found peace through the work of this human, but we cannot let you go with him!]

[I'm sorry, but this has to do with the oath of a mermaid. It can't be helped.]

Sherryl was holding onto Artpe, and the merfolk were holding onto Sherryl. The situation was the highest manifestation of chaos.

Maetel's expression indicated that she really didn't like Sherryl. However, the mermaid was powerful, and she was insisting on following them. She couldn't reject Sherryl in front of her face. Maetel struggled with her feelings. Sienna had been in a similar position as Sherryl in the past, and she was pretty fond of Sherryl. That was why she had a big smile on her face. Roa was too busy eating the demonic energy she had been given permission to eat.

[Hoo-ooh... Not a chance, Sherryl. You will attract more attention than us. Moreover, you are very strong, but you are still too lacking to travel with us.]

[How can this be...]

Sherryl despaired.

Good. It was effective! Artpe pushed forward.

[Sienna is level 247, and she has the lowest level amongst us. She is higher than you by over 100 levels.]

[B... but master... Thanks to master's blessing I was able to evolve, and I awakened to a power that transcends my level!]

[Yes. However, your ability is specialized. It allows you to control the merfolk. It isn't particularly useful when facing a monster. Are you confident that you will be able to kill a level 200 monster by yourself?]

Artpe's merciless comment brought tears to Sherryl's eyes. However, truth was always cruel. Artpe let out a bitter laugh as he continued to speak.

[That is why you should do tasks you are most suited for. You've already given me plenty of help in the process of killing the Kraken. The only thing left is to assign me someone that can guide me to Aedia. We are humans, and you are a mermaid. Our paths diverges here, so let's cleanly part ways.]

[Master, you are cruel... The fact that I can't refute your words makes me more upset.]

Sherryl's head fell when she was continuously attacked with the truth. Artpe let out a bitter laugh as he watched her. He suddenly had an idea, so he spoke to her.

[Let's do this.]

[What is it?]

Sherryl immediately raised her head. Her reaction was so fast that he wondered if she had been waiting for this.

[This isn't just about the merfolk of this ocean. Whether it is this continent or a different one, I want you to rule all the merfolk of this world. I've already killed all the Krakens here, and I've eliminated all the demonic energy in this region. Is there a reason why you have to cling to this place? That is why I want you to go on a crusade.]

[Crusade...]

[It isn't just about the merfolk. I want you to kill any monsters of the ocean that refuses to listen to you. If the monster is strong, I want you to swarm and kill it. If they agree to listen to your words, you can bring them under your command. I want you to snatch up everyone within the ocean. In other words, I want you to become the empress of the ocean. When you achieve this, you'll have nothing left to do in this ocean, right?]

[That will take a very long time to accomplish, but you are right...]

[Your level will have increased by then.]

[You are talking about something that is absurdly far-off, but you are correct again.]

Artpe let out the smile that was peculiar to a swindler. He spoke to her.

[At that time, I'll allow you to join my party]

[...you want me to absorb all the merfolk of the ocean into my kingdom. On top of that, you want me to become the ruler of the ocean's monsters. Is this what you are saying?]

[Yes.]

At that point, Artpe had another thought. Normally when he made such a request, his opponents spouted words like, 'How can I do that! It is an unfair deal! Let's terminate the contract!' However, his opponent was the mermaid Sherryl. She had already sworn her life to him. If it's her, maybe...

[Hoo.]

As expected, Sherryl let out a relaxed smile as she nodded her head!

[All right. I'll do it. I thought you were going to ask me to go kill the Demon King. If that's all you want me to do, I can do it. I'll even raise my level higher than master's level. When I come looking for you, you shouldn't be mean to me.]

[I guess it is great that you are full of confidence...]

Genesis Mermaid. It was a truly frightening race.

Artpe let out a bitter laugh as he turned around. A black cat was stuck close to the corpse of the enormous Kraken, and she was sucking out the enormous amount of demonic energy residing within the dead Kraken. Her tail was swooshing back and forth. He lightly flicked her tail with his finger. She turned around with a scrunched up face. It was as if she was telling him not to interfere while she was eating.

[Nyaa!]

“Roa, are you satisfied by what you ate?”

[Nyaa nyaa nyaa-ah!]

“You are still hungry? You’ve already used this ploy on me before.”

[Nyaa-ah-ah...]

After she endured through the wait, she had been enjoying her buffet time. However, he was trying to restrict her meal again! Roa pulled back with a sullen expression on her face.

Artpe took out a regular empty potion flask, and he Reinforced it three times. In a flash, he created a magic reagent storage bottle. He pushed it towards Sherryl.

[You’ll probably have a use for this in the future. You can harvest it.]

[I’m honored.]

Sherryl took the flask, and she approached the enormous corpse of the Ancient Kraken. She pull out all its demonic energy, and she stored it within the flask.

She refined the demonic energy as she extracted it from the Kraken. By the time the flask was full, there wasn’t a single drop of demonic energy left within the corpse. Artpe mumbled to himself, He had a satisfied expression on his face.

“It is safe for us to eat it now.”

“What is the best way to eat an octopus...?”

“Unni, I heard that it is tasty stuffed within a bread.”

[Nyaa nyaa-ah. Nyaa nyaa nyaa nyaa nyaa nyaa.]

Artpe let his party members get into another debate about how they should cook the octopus. While they were debating, he meticulously looked over the Ancient Kraken's corpse.

In the end, he took the hooks that were nestled within the suction cups, and he took all its ink. He confirmed that there was nothing left that were of any worth. The remaining parts could only be used as food ingredients. He confidently butchered the corpse. He left 90% of the corpse in place, and he put away the rest into his Dimensional Pouch.

He only took 10%, but there was enough to eat for 10 years.

[Since your kingdom went through a war, you are probably short on food. Since you took out the poisonous energy, you can be at ease. You can feed your people with this.]

[Master... I don't know how I will be able to repay all of your kindness.]

He acted as if he didn't care about her at all, yet at the most crucial moment, he showed her his benevolence! At his words, Sherryl became deeply moved. In truth, Artpe wasn't confident his party could eat all of it, so he was leaving it behind. However, he just let her think whatever she wanted.

"I've done everything I can do here. Let's go."

"Yes."

"We are going to go meet our new party member?"

[Nyaa-ah.]

[Let's go.]

[No way.]

They had finally come to an agreement, yet Sherryl nonchalantly tried to bury herself within Artpe's party. Artpe violently kicked Sherryl out. However, a genuine smile formed on her face as she retorted. When he first met her, he would have never imagined seeing such an expression on her face.

[You have told me to conquer the ocean. As soon as I heard those words, I gave orders to the merfolk. Of course, some of those under my rule will be swept up by the Lunatic Wave. However, those that aren't influenced by the Lunatic Wave will outnumber those that are influenced. Basically, my elite force has already started their conquest of this ocean.]

[What?]

[The overall task might take a good amount of time, but it won't take too long to conquer this side of the ocean. As you probably know, the monsters near Diaz is... They are very weak.]

This fact could be confirmed just by seeing the merfolk residing here. They were a race that had established a kingdom, yet the strongest one amongst them was Sherryl at level 139! She was only at that level after going through much growth.

In such an environment, the hero's party had somehow come across Krakens and other strange monsters. They were very unlucky!

[So what?]

[I have nothing to do here. If I'm near my people, their morale will rise, but these are monsters they can defeat without me. That is why I have time to guide you myself.]

[...]

He wanted to refute her words, but he couldn't open his mouth to denounce her when he saw her twinkling eyes.

[I just want to serve you a little bit longer... May I not?]

[Ughh.]

It had always been like this even his past life. He was weak when a woman truly spoke from the bottom of her heart. It was the main reason he had died in vain as one of the Four Heavenly Kings. He always wanted to fix this trait, yet it was easier said than done. If he could have fixed it, he wouldn't have become the weakest amongst the Four Heavenly Kings.

[Eh-whew.]

In the end, he let out a sigh. He nodded his head.

[All right. The ocean road isn't that long. Let's go together.]

[Thank you, master! I will serve you to the best of my abilities! I'll get you to your destination faster than anyone else can!]

[Your monologue makes me a bit nervous. I'm guessing I can't just pay you off with money...]

He had already accepted Sherryl joining the party. When he turned around, Maetel was waiting for him. She was glowering at him. Artpe put on a small smile as he shook his head. Maetel spoke.

“Punishment.”

Artpe completely ignored her words. He yelled out in a refreshing manner.

“Well, let's go!”

“Punishment. I'll carry it out when Artpe is sleeping... it'll be as I've always done.”

“Hey, wait a moment. What did you just say? Hey. Hey!”

Maetel no longer said anything. Artpe wonder if he should set alarm spells and trap spells before he slept in the future. As he seriously thought about it, he stepped onto the Road of Mermaids. Sienna and Roa followed next. Sherryl followed from the rear of the party. Countless merfolk wailed as they saw their queen go out for an excursion.

Two months passed.

“I kinda expected this, but why the hell would an underwater Dungeon suddenly appear here!”

[This is quite strange. This is a Dungeon that had never been found before!]

“Artpe, this Dungeon is fun! The space here is upside down!”

“Oppa, there is another staircase here.”

[Nyaaaaaaa!]

Their path always seemed to be derailed. Another three months passed as they faced more trial and tribulation. They were barely able to arrive at Aedia's port town called Belata.

It was late winter, and the party members felt the biting cold wind on their skin. It was the winter when Artpe and Maetel turned 15 years old.

Chapter 85

A Wrong Encounter (2)

Aedia was the most advanced nation on this continent in regards to Magical Engineering. In truth, it wasn't just Magical Engineering. They performed extensive research on traditional magic, black magic, dimensional magic, and other disciplines... If he was being blunt, Aedia was the headquarter of magical studies. If one wanted to discuss magic on this continent, it all started and ended at Aedia.

"Then there is the holy nation of Paladia that is on the opposite of Aedia. Aedia and Paladia are separated by two oceans and a continent. This is true for all the temples spread across the continent, and the priests and holy knights associated with these temples. They are all affiliated with Paladia."

"So what is Diaz famous for, Artpe?"

"Diaz isn't known for anything. The only thing they can do is create buttered corn cobs."

He wanted to ask her how she couldn't have missed this fact when witnessing the mess within Diaz. However, he held himself back from speaking. When Maetel heard his words, she became a little bit sullen. He let out a bitter laugh as he spoke again.

"However, you were born there, so that should be enough for Diaz."

"...Ah. You can't stay stuff like that so suddenly."

The nation's power was weak, and the monsters that appeared within its borders were weak. Even the amount of ambient Mana within Diaz was low. However, heroes continued to be born there for some reason. He had been trying to convey this fact, yet he seemed to have delivered it in a misleading fashion. It had truly been a long time since Maetel's cheeks had turned red from embarrassment.

He had been telling her facts, and if she derived pleasure from his words, he decided to leave it as is. He turned around to look at his companion, who had travelled with his party. In the past five month, the Genesis Mermaid Queen Sherryl Anaid had broken

through level 200. Of course, everyone within Artpe's party increased rapidly in level, so this was nothing new.

"Thank you for everything up until now, Sherryl."

In the past, she still had some traces baby fat on her face. However, her beauty had completely ripened. The mermaid Sherryl's mere presence let out a dazzling and brilliant light. She spoke with a voice full of regret. Artpe answered her.

"From this point on, it is human territory. I can no longer serve you."

In the past 5 months, her appearance and level weren't the only parts that had gone through a change. As she evolved, her intelligent had increased. This especially affected her understanding of Mana and the fundamental understanding of the other races on this continent. She was able to make rapid progress.

One of the results was her ability to learn languages. In the past, she had only been able to speak the language of the merfolk. Now she spoke the human language. She was able to communicate with her party members with no restrictions.

"You are pushing it already by following me this far. Hurry up and go back."

"I won't be able to serve you for a while. I can't be by your side, master. I don't know where I'll find solace in my life..."

"There are thousands of merfolk waiting for your return. What kind of nonsense are you talking about?"

"Jeez. It didn't work."

Sherryl replied in a playful manner. She moved like a wave moving across a seashore. She casually approached him. She placed a gentle kiss on his cheek, then she retreated. It was a gesture that contained her loyalty and affection.

"I will wait for the day when I will get to serve you again. I'll be back with the ocean in my hands."

"Yes. I'm glad you've become so imposing..."

"I'll see you later, Sherryl unni."

"You would have been a great mermaid if you hadn't wagged your tail at Artpe. When we meet again, please bring a husband with you."

[Nyaa.]

Each party member gave their farewell in their own unique way. Sherryl gave a warm smile to everyone except Maetel. Sparks flew as Sherryl responded to Maetel.

"You better make your move before I return. By that time, you won't hold a candle to me."

"...ho-oh. You've really become brave."

He decided this was their way of saying goodbye to each other. Artpe decided to believe in that. If not, he couldn't bear the heartburn it would cause.

"I'm really going to go now."

She had been standing at the edge of the pier. She lightly jumped backwards. Her body turned into bubbles, and the bubbles melted into the ocean water. She wasn't dead. It was one of the spells she had gained as a Genesis Mermaid.

When she used the spell, Sherryl could travel through the ocean at speeds that was unfathomable by humans. When he saw this, Artpe wondered if he had revived a truly terrifying race.

Maetel was grinding her teeth as she observed everything.

"Why is Artpe so popular! Wh! Why! All the women like Artpe. Aren't there any other men on this world besides Artpe?!"

As someone who liked Artpe the most, she wasn't qualified to say those words. Artpe gave a suitable reply.

"You are also popular. In fact, Silpennon likes you. He's a former prince of a nation."

"I don't need anyone else. I only need Artpe..."

She was 15 years old now, yet she kept saying things that were unbecoming of a hero. Unlike her wrongheadedness, her body was growing at a ridiculous speed. Anyone

who saw her right now would think she was a grown adult.

This was especially true when her breasts and butt were displayed when she took off her armor. There was no way her Innate Ability would influence her in such a way, but they were so full...

“Artpe? Why did you headbutt that pole?”

“This is another form of meditation. Don’t worry about it.”

“Do you want me to heal you, oppa?”

“...thank you.”

Unlike Maetel, who tempted Artpe with worldly desires at the sight of her, Sienna was still at the cusp of being adulthood. Her growth was also fast, and she also had a nice body. However, she was growing at a more conscientious pace than Maetel.

“Let’s head in.”

“It seems there are no boats here, since it is winter.”

“They built four layers of barrier walls here. However, it seems the 1st and 2nd barrier wall were completely destroyed.”

It was easy to forget right now, but they were still in the midst of the Lunatic Wave. The humans didn’t open their docks until spring. It wasn’t until Mana filled up the ocean once again. Of course, Sherryl was conducting her crusade, so the number of monster attacking this place should have decreased. However, the humans were unaware of this fact.

“The city doesn’t have a lot of people either.”

“Winter is a really lonely season.”

[Nyaa.]

Even if the city didn’t have an active population, they would have been noticed since they had just popped out of the ocean. However, Artpe’s party was using a consumable Artifact they had acquired within the underwater Dungeon. It was called the Ocean

Jelly. This was why they were hidden from prying eyes right now.

Ocean Jelly was an item acquired when they defeated monsters that looked like jellyfishes. It was a treasure that hid anyone that ate the Ocean Jelly. The best characteristic of this consumable Artifact was the fact that the camouflage became more complete depending on how much Mana one possessed.

This was obvious, but no one in this city... no one in this nation had the capability to discover them.

Moreover, Artpe and Maetel was encroaching on level 280.

After defeating the Ancient Kraken, Artpe's party had been on the road to Aedia for the past five months.

It wasn't as good as receiving expert attention from the chef. However, it made one wonder why it was like this under the ocean.

That monster was inside the ocean? That monster was here too? Why is that bastard here? He had to ask these questions to himself, because he kept facing powerful monsters one after another. He kept finding Dungeons crawling with monsters. Naturally, the average level of the hero's party went up as a result.

Artpe and Maetel had crossed the level 260 mark after killing the Ancient Kraken. They had almost increased 20 levels since then.

"Mmm. At this rate, I think we might be able to invade the Demon world..."

"Let's do that!"

"Heek."

[Nyaa! Nyaa nyaa nyaa啊!]

Artpe was half serious as he mumbled to himself. However, Maetel's eyes immediately twinkled when she heard his words. She yelled out loud. Sienna became a bit scared, so she stuck close to Artpe. The one that gave the most enthusiastic response was Roa. The Demon world was full of curses and Demonic energy that Roa would go nuts over.

"No, we aren't ready yet. Let's stick to our original schedule."

[Nyaah...]

"Artpe, you are being too cautious. But that side of you is wonderful."

"Up until now, you've escaped dangerous situations way too easily. I think that is why you are lacking a sense of crisis. Even if you think you can't be killed, a single mistake could kill a human. No, this applies to all beings."

"Ah..."

Artpe had lightly thrown those words at her, but it shut Maetel's mouth up.

What was she thinking?

When Maetel kept her mouth, her mature looks made Artpe sometimes think about the hero from the past. He also became silent as he looked at the side of Maetel's face.

Finally, she opened her mouth.

"I was being too rash. Artpe is trying so hard to protect me. I said we should go to the Demon world, because I didn't want more women to join our party... I'm an idiot. I know Artpe is amazing, so I put all my trust in this fact. I acted childish by asking for the impossible."

"Is that really the only reason why you wanted us to go to the Demon world immediately!?"

"But all the new members of our party are women..."

Maetel stopped beating herself up. She pouted. However, she soon shook her head, and she clung to Artpe's arm.

"I won't complain anymore. Artpe can do whatever you see fit to do. You can bring 10 or even 20 women. If I'm the first amongst them, I can tolerate it."

"They aren't all women."

"Really!?"

Color immediately returned to Maetel's face.

“I hope he is a handsome man! He should be handsome enough to make the magician fall in love with him!”

“Very. I heard a rumor that said he is very handsome. I’m not sure if he would be in favor of joining our party or not...”

“He must be really famous if there are rumors about him.”

“Yes, I think so.”

He was the next candidate Artpe wanted to bring into his party. He was so famous that it wouldn’t have been strange for Artpe, who was from the secluded mountain village of Diaz, to have heard about him. The only problem was he had no idea if he could make the man join his party without a hitch.

This man had been in the hero’s party in Artpe’s past life. He was such a strange figure that he had no idea how the hero’s party had been able to bring him in...

“It might be, because Maetel’s appearance.”

“Im not that pretty. I don’t think I’ll be able to pick him up.”

“You are so full of it everytime you say such words. Let’s go.”

The effect of the Ocean Jelly wasn’t infinite. He didn’t think there was anyone within the city that could see through their camouflage, but there was no downside in being cautious.

He thought about going inland as fast as possible. Moreover, he had some business he had to deal with next...

As he had such thoughts, Artpe turned his head, and he discovered someone had encroached with the range of his Read All Creation ability. Artpe immediately grabbed his party members, and he used Blink. In a flash, they traveled several hundred meters. They arrived at the heart of the city where there were a lot of people.

“Artpe, why did you suddenly... Huh.”

“...unni, you felt it too?”

Instead of answering her, Maetel narrowed her eyes as she got into her fighting stance. Sienna did the same. Artpe tried to use Blink again, but he heard a voice before he could do so.

[Found. Camouflage status. No ill or murderous intent. Be wary of the non-combatants.]

When he heard the voice, Artpe gave up on using Blink again. His shoulders slumped as he lamented.

“Why now? Why here?”

“Artpe, I don’t know the answers even if you ask me those questions... Ah. Shall I kill the gods for you?”

“Yes. Please do so.”

At Artpe’s earnest voice, Maetel let out a bright smile as she nodded her head. She brought up her finger like an aunty wanting a freebie when buying fish. She pointed at the throw-in as she asked him a question.

“What about her?”

“Ah. You can’t kill her...”

“Found..... strong. Battle..... No chance of winning. Impossible to run..... attempt conversation.”

She spoke in a voice that was hard to understand. A brat wearing a robe was slowly walking towards them. Artpe checked her once again. He let out a sigh as he spoke.

“She’s our next party member.”

She had been the previous hero party’s strongest firepower. It was the moment when they encountered the magician Regina.

Chapter 86

A Wrong Encounter (3)

“Mmm? Did I leave the fire on at home?”

“My wife is nearing the end of her pregnancy. I shouldn’t be going to the pub right now.”

“The war shouldn’t affect this place, but there is no downside in being careful...”

The surrounding people were slowly vacating the street. The people had not sensed the grave mood of the party. They weren’t exiting, because they were being courteous. A powerful magic had taken control of their perception. A powerful suggestion was being hammered against them. It said, ‘If you don’t immediately go into a building, something really bad will happen.’

It was basically akin to assassinating the will of hundreds, maybe thousands of humans. It wasn’t something a normal human could pull off. Even an Archmage over level 300 would have a hard time accomplishing this spell. Yes, it was a show of power that suited the Demon race.

However, the magician that created such a grand sight didn’t pay attention to the retreating humans.

She glared straight at Artpe. She was on guard against him.

“You are powerful. You possess an authority that cannot be resisted against... What is your purpose in coming to this land?”

The small girl’s face slightly crumpled when she felt Artpe’s magical energy. However, she didn’t retreat. Instead, she asked him a question. There was fear and a slight hostility towards him. The weakest emotion he could feel was curiosity.

Somehow, he had to establish an amicable relationship with this girl. However, Artpe had no idea how he would be able to achieve this. A sigh automatically slipped out. If the amount of times he sighed corresponded with his wealth, he would probably be

ranked as one of the richest man on this continent.

Why did he have to achieve his goal as soon as he came ashore? Moreover, it happened in the worst possible way! In his past life, this girl should have been in her tower at this point in time. She should be in her room spending her day in a tedious and boring manner...

However, this only applied to the girl from his previous life. The flow of history was running in a completely different direction now. He was already well aware of this fact. She was the ultimate reason why he had stepped onto this land, so it shouldn't have been strange to see the Archmage Regina reside in this port city.

"Oppa, are you sure it is this kid? She's really small."

"...she is small. Is she perhaps another rival? No, Artpe said I should grow quickly... What should I do? I'm so confused!"

Sienna and Maetel started to prattle on to their heart's content. However, their words didn't reach Artpe's ears. It wasn't visible, but he was too busy competing with the girl with Mana.

Up until now, no one had been able to compete with Artpe in terms of how much Mana one possessed. The fact that she could contend directly with him in terms of magical energy meant he didn't even need to bother gauging her ability. She was one of the best.

'Yes, her abilities were already complete to a certain degree at this point in time. That is why I wanted to join up with her as soon as possible... '

In his past life, the magician Regina was in charge of AOE damage dealing within the hero's party. When the hero's party invaded into the Demon King's castle, she still possessed her small physique.

She was currently wearing a similar robe to Artpe. The black robe covered her entire body, and the hood was covering her face. No matter how much one tried to look at her face, one could only see her golden eyes. A normal person would not have paid attention to her. She looked like a small kid wearing a musty robe.

However, it was different for Artpe. In front of his eyes, no one could avoid his observation.

He could see her. He could see the magician Regina. Her face, slender body, Record and her nature was revealed to him.

[Name : Regina De Patreta Elocants Rodelrote]

[Class : Winter Magician]

[Level L 250]

[Strength : 125 Agility : 125 Stamina : 125 Magic : 1,750]

'She has 1,750 Magic at level 250. It is immense even after seeing it once before.'

Of course, Artpe has reached level 280, so his Magic was close to 2,300. It was too simplistic to say that he was much stronger than her. Artpe possessed the special magical energy of a Hero Class, and he had learned numerous skills. He had also inherited the Mana characteristics of a Demon. This was why his magical energy had experienced such overwhelming growth compared to other magicians.

If he was to get to the point, Regina's magical energy status had reached a high rank territory that no other humans had ever reached in the past. The past hero's party was able to carry out such acts of brutality, because she possessed an idiotic amount of magical energy.

It was the same for Artpe too.

"Hello. The weather is great, right?"

"There is a snowstorm forming right now. Majority of humans try to avoid such weather."

"Your response is quite dreary."

In his past life, she had reached a territory that should have been close to impossible for a human to reach. A girl, who suddenly appeared out of nowhere, had reached it.

She wasn't like Artpe, who had returned to the past through his special Innate Ability.

How was this possible!

The answer was simple.

She wasn't human.

[Race : Demite]

Demite was the highest of Artifacts that possessed its own will. It could gain level and Class. She was a golem that was made out of Demite. This was the Archmage Regina's true identity.

If one didn't have the Read All Creation ability, no one would have never been able to guess this.

A golem was made with the priceless Demite!

Moreover, the golem developed into becoming an Archmage!

If he had been a normal hero, he wouldn't have known what she was. He would have adventured with her over the long years. Initially, she would be unable to express herself emotionally. However, he would notice her heart slowly change over the years, and when he realized this fact, he would be happy. Then he would start to dig in into the truth about her. He would find out her buried past or her secret, and he would despair. Despite her being a golem, he would accept her even though she was a golem. Their relationship would advance, and he would take another step in becoming a true hero...

It would have been a great opportunity of growth for the hero.

However, Artpe possessed the Read All Creation ability. He didn't have to go through all that. He had seen through to the truth from the start.

This was why his relationship and mental attitude towards her wouldn't grow. He wasn't moved nor inspired by her. Regina was just a golem. Artpe simply acknowledged the fact that a golem had appeared in front of them. That was it.

He probably had to tell Maetel and Sienna about her, so they wouldn't be shocked by this fact.

So what if she was a golem? It didn't matter if she wasn't a human. Artpe treated everyone in a fair manner in thought and action. They were either his enemy or his

ally. If possible, he hoped Regina would be in the latter category.

“Mana response detected. Search... Unadvisable. Resistance... Unadvisable. Recalculate possibility of running away. Unadvisable.”

Did she detect his use of the Read All Creation ability? After suddenly spouting such words, Regina slightly lowered her head. She looked crestfallen. Artpe smirked as he raised both hands.

“You already know this right? We hold no hostility towards you.”

“If that is true, you should reveal your identities. Why are you using a camouflage Artifact?”

When asking for another person’s name, one had to reveal one’s name first. He wanted to point this out, but it was true that he had come here camouflaged. He decided to lose on this argument. Artpe wondered how he should proceed, but he decided to act as usual.

“It isn’t as if camouflaging oneself is illegal. So why are you holding us up? Why are you posing as an interrogator?”

That’s right. He went for the shameless approach. Regina had been silent, but when she was accused of being a fraud, she glared at him as she spoke.

“I am carrying out a secret mission given to me by my country.”

“So we are getting in the way of you carrying out that secret mission? Is that right?”

“...”

At that moment, the position of advantage had switched. Regina quickly closed her mouth. She realized she had given away information about herself. Still, this didn’t mean she did anything to rectify it. She stood frozen absent-mindedly.

It seemed she was puzzled as to how she should proceed. It was understandable.

Whenever she hadn’t been able to solve her problems with words, she always

somewhat solved the problem with a show of power.

However, she couldn't win against any members of Artpe's party. Obviously, this was the first time she had faced such a situation. On top of that, she hadn't dealt with any complicated problems that wasn't related to magic. Of course, she would become panicked in such a situation.

"I..."

At that moment, she once again opened her mouth. She was trying to say something. Artpe patiently waited for further words from her. In the end, his patience bore fruit.

"What should I do?"

"Why are you asking me that!"

She was another one that would give him a headache! Artpe reacted instinctively to rebuke her. Then he let out a sigh as he opened his mouth.

"We don't want to draw attention to ourselves from other people, so we are maintaining the camouflage. As you can probably see, our powers doesn't look common. Right?"

He didn't plan on telling her everything, but by observing her state, Artpe thought she would back off if he cooked up a somewhat believable story. The most important thing right now was the 'secret mission' she was carrying out. He had to make her believe that his party had nothing to do with her mission.

"Do you have intentions of attacking civilians or soldiers?"

"If I had such intentions, wouldn't I have gone after you first?"

"...your line of reasoning sounds plausible. I'm drawing a conclusion that you aren't an enemy or an ally. You are a third party."

Afterwards, her expression turned peculiar.

"You aren't an ally or an enemy, so you shouldn't be on this land... Where did you come from?"

"You think in binary terms about as much as me. I'm not sure how you can come to such a conclusion... Wait a moment."

Artpe stopped Regina from speaking her absurd words. He raised his head. As a precaution, he had been setting up Mana Strings infused with his Read All Creation ability. He had been worried another magician would intrude on their conversation. He had worried it would make the current situation more complicated.

At that moment, something had disturbed his Mana Strings.

"You said you are on a secret mission?"

"That's right. It is a secret mission, so I can't reveal the details. If you are going to forcefully extract the information from me, you will be considered an enemy. In that scenario, I will run away."

"I don't plan on extracting the information, so you don't have to bounce."

Artpe's eyes turned calm and bottomless. It happened when he was about to use his magical energy for real. The powerful Mana reaction caused particles to become concentrated in his eyes. It was the result of ambient Mana being drawn in from the air. Maetel always liked Artpe, but she liked this Artpe the most.

"However, it seems I'll soon find out whether I like it or not. What do you think?"

"...acceptable."

"Artpe, I also know what you are talking about."

Maetel ignored the question and answer session between Artpe and Regina. She spoke with a cold voice that was like iron. Her hand was already on the sheathe of her longsword

"There are idiots, who are letting out murderous intent, coming towards the city."

It wasn't just one or two people. There were around 100 of them. Moreover, the murderous intent was coming from normal knights. They were the elite of the elites.

It seemed they weren't coming to fight someone specific. It didn't matter if one could

or couldn't feel their murderous intent. Their movement indicated that they would indiscriminately kill everyone.

He planned on taking a leisurely tour of Aedia. He planned on seeing some sceneries, and he planned on visiting all the magic towers to inquire about magic books. However, Artpe could smell the blood that was about to be shed in the coming battle. His face crumpled in a wretched manner as he mumbled to himself.

"This shouldn't happen unless there is a war going on. That means..."

"I believe that you guys are a third party."

At that moment, Regina's vigilance against Artpe's party was completely lowered. She gave an explanation.

"Magic Kingdom Aedia is in its fifth month of war against the allied forces of the Daiatan kingdom and the Duchy of Tiata. If you are humans from this land, there is no way you wouldn't have known about this."

"Yes, thank you for informing us."

"By the amount of power you all possess, I judge that you guys came from across the ocean. You didn't want to draw attention to yourselves, so you chose the option of camouflage. Excellent decision."

"Yes, thank you for acknowledging it."

"I would like to make an offer to the third party."

It seemed she was unable to pick up on Artpe's sarcastic remarks. Regina's voice had been cold and hard. However, there was a bit of relief in her voice as she spoke to them.

"This is from the magical kingdom of Aedia. We would like to extend an offer for you all to join as wartime mercenaries. The reward will be high, and you will gain rank. If your war record is excellent, you will be promoted to commissioned officer. You may be appointed to a branch manager. You'll feel great."

"Where did you get that manual you are reciting? Why don't you give me a straight answer?"

“Secret.”

He had no idea who had inserted those suspicious words of invitation into her.

Even if she tried to convince him with a sweet offer, Artpe had only one answer.

He immediately turned down the offer.

Chapter 87

A Wrong Encounter (4)

He didn't care if the headquarters of the mages was attacked. An attack on Aedia was Aedia's problem. He had no inclination of fighting another country by joining Aedia's side. Of course, when he decisively turned down her offer, a weak expression of dismay appeared on Regina's face.

"Very difficult..."

Regina had a troubled expression on her face as she hesitated. In the end, her shoulders slumped a little bit as she mumbled to herself.

"Failed negotiation. Opponent shows no hostility. Ignore and carry out mission."

"What is your mission?"

"Secret."

After telling him that it was a secret, she turned around. She gazed past the city towards the force of several hundred rushing towards them. This was obvious, but she was a golem made by the magicians of Aedia. She had to follow orders given by her country. This was why it was her mission to face an army that was invading her nation.

"You know what? I kind of want to have a conversation with them."

Artpe spoke carefully. However, at his words, Regina's pupils shook in a severe manner. She shook her head from side to side as she opened her mouth to speak. There was a slight tremor in her voice.

"Unacceptable."

"Is that so? Do you have to kill them for your secret mission?"

"Secret."

Artpe unintentionally succeeded in stirring up her emotions. Up until now, he was sure Regina had never shown her tearful face to anyone! It was starting to get pretty fun dealing with her. However, he couldn't let this drag on any further.

"Maetel."

Artpe looked at Maetel, who had a conflicted expression on her face. He solemnly nodded his head as he flicked his finger. It was a combo moves between the two heroes. Everything happened in lightning speed.

"Eh-eet."

"Koo-oohk."

When he flicked his finger, Maetel moved. Regina didn't even have time to chant her defensive magic. All her defensive measures were pierced by Maetel. Regina fainted from the assault! The combination of moves was more suited for a villain than a hero. However, this suited his goal for now.

"All right. Carry her."

"Yes!"

"All right. Let's go!"

"Yes!"

Artpe and his party headed towards the road, and they quickly exited the port city of Belata. They had briskly wrapped up their work, yet swear words kept pouring out of his mouth...

"Shit. Why the hell did a war break out right now?"

The Daiatan kingdom was located north of Aedia. On the other hand, the Duchy of Tiata was located south of Aedia. It seemed Aedia was fighting a war against the allied forces of Daiatan and Tiata.

This was obvious, but in Artpe's previous life, Aedia had never fought a war against Daiatan and Tiata. In fact, it had been a war between the Duchy of Tiata and the Daiatan kingdom. In his previous life, Aedia had come in support of Tiata. This was

understandable, since Duke Eritahd of Tiata was the brother of the current king of Aedia.

"Why would the Duchy of Tiata betray Aedia? Why did they join up with Daiatan? This shouldn't have happened."

"Did Daiatan make an offer that the Duchy of Tiata couldn't refuse?"

Maetel carefully told him her conjecture. Artpe smirked as he nodded his head.

"Yes, that's possible. At the very least, Daiatan is probably thinking that very thing right now."

"You don't think that's the case?"

"Of course."

The Duchy of Tiata was a city state that broke off early from Aedia. Since there were blood ties between Tiata and Aedia, there had always been a close relationship between the two. That is why it would be a big blow to Aedia if Dianan was successful in luring Tiata away.

However, Artpe was having a hard time believing Tiata had betrayed Aedia. In his past life, Aedia and Tiata worked hand in hand with each other. In fact, one of their joint ventures had caused the hero of his past life to become disappointed in humanity...

"Wait a moment...?"

Artpe's stopped walking. The other party members stopped walking. Maetel was carrying the unconscious Regina. Her limbs were limp.

"A joint venture... Could it be?"

"Artpe?"

When Maetel called out his name, Artpe quickly turned his head to look at her.

"Do you remember my promise to Mycenae?"

"Yes. You promised to take on a quest related to the Forest of Eternity."

"That's right. In truth, the Forest of Eternity shares borders with the Duchy of Tiata."

The aloof tribes of Elves lived within the Forest of Eternity. Tiata and the surrounding nations were always covetous of the forest and the Elves. This was why there was always a war underway in an attempt to possess them.

In the end, Aedia helped Tiata bring calamity to the Forest of Eternity, and it had created a big wound in the hero's heart.

'If this war is related to that... This is pure speculation.'

The incident from his past life occurred when the hero was over twenty years old. However, Mycenae had spoken about this very subject during the making of their personal contract. It was safe to assume that Aedia and Tiata had long been at this venture.

So why would they suddenly sever their relationship with each other?

Aedia had always supported the work of the Duchy of Tiata, so it was hard to fathom Tiata revolting against Aedia... If one took into account their close relationship, the alliance with Dianat was a farce. Therefore, the thing they were aiming for was...

"Maybe the war that is occurring right now is..."

"Artpe, you can explain it to me a little bit later. They are almost here."

Maetel's voice stopped his train of thoughts. When he raised his head, he caught sight of them too.

A group of men and horses were heading straight for the port city of Belata. There were several hundred of them. There was a nefarious energy emanating from each one of them. It looked as if they were willing to destroy anything in their path.

Artpe shook his head from side to side. It was a signal that let Maetel know that she shouldn't act yet. Artpe cleared his throat, and he yelled out in a friendly and inviting voice. He made sure his intentions couldn't be misunderstood by his opponents.

"Hey, guys. Why don't you guys stop for a brief moment?/ I have some questions I would like to ask you!"

However, the answer that came back was unbelievably cold.

"They are enemies! I can feel magical energy around all of them!"

"Let's just mow them down! We were told to kill all of them! Leave no witnesses alive!"

"These bitches are extraordinary beauties, captain. If it is fine with you, we can capture them alive..."

"We are working towards a great cause, so don't reveal such filthy and crude personal desires! Kill them all!"

"...yes, sir!"

Artpe had called out to them first, yet he was instantly labeled as an enemy! They planned on killing Artpe's party. Fortunately, they didn't act like the knights from the old stories. They didn't say, 'Ku-he-he. I want you to capture the pretty women alive!'

"People these days are really heartless."

"Artpe, aren't they enemies?... I'll kill them?"

"We will, but... Wait a moment"

Artpe sighed as he waved his hand. His Hyper Rubbing spell had almost reached maturity. The spell created a smooth surface. The horses couldn't stop their own momentum, so they slid across the floor.

The low level soldiers fell, and they couldn't get up again. The nimble soldiers amongst them were barely able to avoid the crash. They were able to stand on solid ground once again.

"Magic! He's an enemy magician!"

"Damn it. Throw it!"

Each of them brought out a dagger. When one was hit by the dagger, it would disrupt the magician's flow of Mana. Moreover, an extreme pain was created to disrupt the casting of a spell. These were weapons typically used against Archmages. It seemed they came prepared with Artifacts that would allow them to subdue magicians. It

seemed Daiatan was taking this war pretty seriously...

"You dare?"

"Koo-hahhhhhhhhk!"

"Ggooh-ook, goohaaaaaaaaah!"

At Artpe's hand gesture, several dozen Mana Strings plucked the daggers out the air, and he sent them back from where they came from.

In such a brief amount of time, Artpe's Mana was injected into the daggers. They exploded when they reached their owners. Anyone that could sense Mana was shocked by his surprising technique.

"We can't fight him. I have no idea what method he is using!"

"Retreat. Retreat!"

"Tsk."

Artpe clicked his tongue. He didn't like to indiscriminately kill all the humans. However, the thing he despised more was seeing soldiers run away immediately when the upperhand was taken from them.

"I have something I want to ask you."

"Huhk!?"

In that moment, Artpe stood in the middle of the battlefield that had gone to hell. He became better at using the Blink Boots the more he used it. Whether it was a spell, skill or an Artifact's option, he could use it as if it was an extension of his body. He was proud of this fact.

"H... h... how the hell..."

Several knights tried to rush him with their weapons. However, in the next moment, Mana Strings extended out from Artpe's entire body. He bound the soldiers tight. They could do nothing.

“Hurry up and run... Koohk!?”

It was the same for those that tried to run away. The Mana Strings were infused with critical amount of magical energy and killing intent. They covered the battlefield in no time. The several hundred knights were unable to move.

When he first learned the Mana String, it had been burdensome to create just five strings. After he reached level 280, he possessed more Mana than what he possessed in his previous life. Artpe had sufficient Mana to create 500 strings.

“So... Who’s the leader?”

After he subdued everyone, Artpe opened his mouth. However, no one answered him. Artpe had no choice, but to change the question.

“Where are you from?”

Finally, one knight cautiously raised his head as he yelled out.

“W... we are the knights of the exalted Diatean kingdom!”

“However, Aedia’s army isn’t here. Don’t you guys know about the international law of engagement?”

“...”

Soldiers had to fight soldiers. It was clear that this city had only civilians. If they attacked this place, it was the worst taboo amongst the agreed upon international laws. It was enough to make Diatean become the pariah of the continent.

Since they knew they what kind of sin they were committing, silence quickly descended amongst the knights. Artpe snorted.

“When did knights become a band of ruffians?”

“Our foremost goal is to win this war! We are willing to become ruffians for our cause!”

“However, if you lose after committing such acts, you would look like useless trash. Isn’t that right?”

Artpe sounded bored as he spoke. He flicked his hand. In a flash, the Mana Strings subduing the knights were gone. The knights were taken aback. They immediately stood up.

“What...!?”

“D... don’t attack him. He can use his magic again at a moment’s notice!”

“Vigilance! Be on your guard!”

Fortunately, they weren’t too stupid. They no longer tried to run away. Moreover, they didn’t try to attack Artpe again. Artpe was satisfied when the knights warily stood in place. When Artpe chilled as he stood in place, one of the knights slowly approached him. He looked to be the leader.

“Are you perhaps... Are you not affiliated with Aedia?”

“Did you ever hear about such a strong magician like me residing in Aedia?”

“You magical energy and appearance... I have never heard of you. You were able to subdue our knights with a slight wave of your hand. If we knew Aedia had a monster like you, we would have never went against Aedia even with the help of our collaborators.”

It was too bad for them, but Aedia already had Regina. She was weaker than Artpe, but she would be able to easily overpower these knights.

In other words, Daitan was fighting an unwinnable war. Regina’s secret mission was probably to take out these knights.

“I already know you aren’t Aedia’s magician. So why...?”

Why was he in a country that was in the midst of a war? Why did he subdue them? Why was he sparing them? They had a lot of questions.

Artpe’s reply was simple.

“I want to meet your superiors. I’ll tell you my reasons.”

Artpe’s eyes twinkled in an evil manner.

"Hire me. I want to join in the war against Aedia as a wartime mercenary. It'll be very expensive to hire me."

Chapter 88

Sleeping With the Enemy (1)

“Wartime mercenaries...!?”

The captain’s eyes opened wide. He couldn’t believe the words coming out of Artpe’s mouth. The magician in front of him was powerful enough not to be attached to any nation, yet he said he wanted to be a wartime mercenary. It was such a practical word.

“That’s right. I’ll make sure you guys win against Aedia no matter what. However, you will have to pay the price.”

“Even if I’m offered such a deal... It isn’t within the scope of my authority to accept it.”

The captain never expected to encounter such a situation, so he was extremely taken aback. On the other hand, it wasn’t as if he could turn down the offer from a supernaturally strong being, so the captain planned on getting ahold of Artpe using flattering words.

However, at that moment...

“Kyahhhk!”

The shrill scream of a girl could be heard alongside the sound of an explosion. When he turned to look, he caught sight of Regina floating in the air. Maetel was below Regina. She was grinding her teeth as she jumped towards Regina.

“Where are you going!”

“Running away.”

“You can’t go!”

When Maetel landed, she bent her knees. She activated her Acceleration ability, and she was able to jump several hundred meters into the air. She turned a simple jump into a hyper jump.

“Koohk...!”

Regina used several dozen types of spells at once. She tried to use Teleportation magic at the same time as she tried to bind Maetel. However, the two beams emitted by Maetel’s longsword cancelled all her magic spells. When Regina saw this, her eyes turned round. Afterwards, Maetel grabbed her by the scruff.

“I said you can’t go!”

“Kahk!?”

Maetel threw Regina towards the ground! Even if Regina was a golem, her function was geared more towards magic than physical ability. She couldn’t withstand the shock, so she fainted.

“...”

“...”

A delicate girl had floated into the air, and she had used dozens of spells. In the very same moment, another delicate girl destroyed all the spells, and she had thrown the first girl towards the ground. It was a distance of several hundred meters. All the knights amiably fell silent when they witnessed this sight. Artpe let out a bright smile as he continued to speak.

“They are my party members. Aren’t they strong?”

“You guys are a powerful collection of individuals. Where have you been all this time? Why have you stepped forward at this moment in time?”

The captain asked in a serious manner. Artpe also answered in a serious manner.

“We came from within the ocean.”

“It seems you have no intentions of answering my question... Well, it doesn’t matter. Your words have reassured me. If it means victory for our nation, we are willing to ally with everyone except the Demon race... My superiors will probably not turn down your offer.”

"All right. The most admirable part is that you guys won't ally yourselves with the Demons."

"Ha..."

When Artpe replied in a joking manner, the captain's face crumpled in a peculiar way.

"We did try to kill the civilians, and it is a sin that can't be washed away. Even if we were stopped in our attempt, it is a sin that we must bear for the rest of our lives. However, even we won't sell out the entirety of humanity. Would such foolish people really exist in this world?"

Such people existed... However, Artpe declined to speak this out loud. There will come a day when they'll find out this truth. It might be sooner rather than later.

"I'll bring my party members. Ah. Before I do that..."

"Mmmm?"

Artpe lightly wave his hands. That was all that he did. One of the knights had been standing around absentmindedly, and blood erupted from an unfortunate location.

"Ggoo-ahhhhhhhk!"

"I'll be back. You guys can wait for me here."

"..."

The nearby knights were shocked as they took a step backwards. Artpe spoke as he put on a cold smile. The captain couldn't say anything despite Artpe's act of violence. The knight had lost the possibility of a future, but the captain had a hunch as to why such an act had been committed against him.

The knight that had just died right now had spoken up right before they clashed against Artpe's party. He had spoke vulgar words when he saw the beauty of Maetel and Sienna.

"Captain, he is too dangerous! We have to turn him down!"

"We will be creating an irrevocable problem!"

“No. I want you all to be quiet.”

When he saw Artpe use Blink to head towards his party members, the captain spoke in a low voice.

“How can I not know that? However, this magician doesn’t need to deal with us to accomplish what he wants. On top of that, he is someone that we can’t control. If this is all true, wouldn’t it be better to make it so that our nation benefits in the process?”

“Still, he didn’t need to kill one of our comrades! Moreover, there are knights here that have lost their arms to him!”

“It isn’t as if his actions were groundless. He had a personal grudge against that knight. He has a good case for the actions he took.”

“But...!”

“I’ve already prepared to give up my life for this war. Isn’t it the same for you all?”

“...”

The captain looked at his subordinates, who had shut their mouths. He spoke with a bitter voice.

“I want you to keep your personal feeling in check before you make your call. If you still can’t accept my decision, you can officially bring it up with my superiors. The decision will be made from up on high.”

“Koohk...”

While there were heated exchanges going on between the knights, Artpe re-joined his party. He checked on Regina’s status.

“As expected, she is quite sturdy. She fell several hundred meters to impact on the frozen ground, yet she has no outward injuries.”

“Tsk.”

He ignored the sound of Maetel clicking her tongue as he carried Regina. He had just met the magician, and he couldn’t let her go free. He planned on taking her with him

like this. When Maetel saw this, she asked him a question.

"Artpe, isn't this kid affiliated with Aedia? So why did you talk about joining up with Daitan? If we want this kid to join our party, we should be fighting on the side of Aedia."

"It isn't as simple as that. Aedia, Daitan and Tiata are currently... Moreover, we have to keep what is happening in the Forest of Eternity in mind."

"Do you think the Forest of Eternity has something to do with what's happening here?"

"Maybe. That is why I'm going to check it out for myself."

He would drag along Regina as he did so. Regina's sense of self was sparse, but it wasn't as if it wasn't there. He could probably guide her towards the right decision. He was sure she would join up with them.

Moreover...

"By the way, you tried to kill regular soldiers for your own gain. It looked as if you didn't feel any regret in doing so."

"If it is for Artpe, I'll do anything... ah-yaht."

She was speaking out loud such terrifying words, so Artpe flicked her forehead pretty hard.

"There are other ways to achieve your goals. There is no reason why you should harm other people. This is especially true for the innocent people. You bear the responsibility of holding the Hero Class, so you should think hard on my words."

"But Artpe... Wouldn't there come a time when I would have to do the very thing I mentioned? There might come a time when I will have to cut down an innocent to achieve a goal we really want. At the very least, there will come a time when I would have to harm such people... Wouldn't that time come in the future?"

At her words, Artpe stopped for a brief moment. Why would it not happen? They were heroes, and each of their actions affected the world. He could think up too many scenarios that it put him in a tough spot. Unbeknownst to them, they might have already harmed innocents several times without realizing it.

“Don’t worry about it.”

Despite this fact, Artpe was firm with his words.

“That will never happen.”

At the very least, he wouldn’t let her experience it. He would do the dirty work. In his past life, the hero’s comrades did the same thing.

This was why she would always shine with the light of purity. She would be radiant like herself from the past.

Artpe didn’t voice his thoughts out loud, yet Maetel’s expression turned nasty.

“Artpe, you are thinking about something weird again. I always know. Sometimes, Artpe puts on a grim face like right now!”

“As expected, you really are using a mind reading skill.”

“Eeeeeek.”

Maetel looked pretty angry as she glared up at him. However, Artpe didn’t budge an inch. Maetel was out of patience, so she was about to unleash her rebuke like a wildfire. At that moment, Artpe extended his hand, and he placed it on her head.

“This isn’t a problem that I can accept and forget just because Artpe patted my head...”

“Be a little bit more patient, Maetel.”

“Huh...?”

“When you grow up a little bit more and your heart is a bit more hardened, I’ll share everything with you... until that time, I want you to leave everything to me.”

Artpe came up with an adequate cover for himself, but his words caused her cheeks to turn red. It was as if her cheeks were about to explode. She was already in a good state, but she was barely able to squeeze out a rebuttal.

“B... but Artpe is the same age as me...”

"I'm more mature mentally compared to my age. You are more immature compared to your age. Of course, there is a difference between us."

"Artpe is bad."

He hadn't hesitated to assault her with the truth. Maetel pushed her lips forward. However, it seemed she had accepted his words. She leaned in closer as she slightly moved her lips.

"When the time come, you have to share it with me."

"All right."

Good. As expected, she was a simple woman. He was mumbling these thoughts inwardly as he let out a smile of satisfaction. At that moment, Maetel's lips fluttered, and she let out some sharp words. It made Artpe's heart stop.

"You have to tell me everything Artpe is hiding."

"..."

It was an unexpected counterattack. Unless one was an idiot, one would have picked up on the fact that he was unusual. She was supposed to be an idiot, so he had never expected Maetel to say such words.

How long had she known? Maybe, she knew it from the beginning? He didn't think that was possible, yet she had kept her thoughts secret. She had brought it up at this moment. He wasn't sure about anything any more.

"Artpe?"

For a brief moment, Artpe was at a loss for words. Maetel slightly raised her head, and she her gaze remained fixed on him. Her emerald colored eyes were pure and unfathomably deep. It was as if she was looking deep into his soul.

"You..."

"Are you going to share it with me?"

"...all right. I lost. I'll tell you."

It was a complete defeat. Maybe, she called into question his attitude, because she wanted to lead the conversation this way. Artpe cleanly admitted his defeat.

“Someday... I’ll tell you someday.”

“Yes, that is enough for now.”

Maetel’s face became much brighter as she backed off. Artpe felt sorry towards Maetel, but he couldn’t tell her the whole truth. So from when to when should he make up the story? He had to make it so that the story sounded plausible. Maetel had to accept it as the truth.

Artpe decided to take a day off in the future, and he would come up with a story that no one would suspect it to be false. When he was having such thoughts, someone grabbed Artpe’s sleeve.

“Oppa, I feel left out...”

“Ah.”

Sienna had been excluded from the conversation between the two heroes. She was close to tears at that moment. Even if she was very patient, she couldn’t endure the space that had been created between Artpe and Maetel! It was a space where only the two of them had existed!

“Will you share it with me too, oppa? You’ll share it with me, right? Yes?”

“Yes, I’ll share it with you too.”

“Ya-ho! I love oppa so much!”

He planned on making up a story to tell Maetel, so it wouldn’t matter if he had one more audience. Artpe didn’t hesitate at all as he nodded his head. Sienna was so happy that she hugged him. Sure enough, Maetel became angry when she saw this display.

“Wait a moment. I worked so hard to hear that answer from you, so why did you give such a prompt answer to Sienna? Wasn’t it supposed to be a secret between Artpe and me!?”

“That’s because oppa likes younger women. Isn’t that right...?”

"Stop saying words that'll be misunderstood. Let's go."

Artpe patted his noisy companions, and they headed towards the knights. Of course, Regina was still unconscious.

The captain had mentioned that his superiors had the authority to make decisions. He wanted Artpe's party to meet with his superiors directly, so the captain quickly acquired a carriage. After Artpe's party got on the carriage, they were treated with utmost care.

Of course, they were still deep within enemy territory. They couldn't place flowers on the road or blow trumpets on the way back. Still, the knights were extremely submissive in their behavior as they treated Artpe's party with respect. It made one wonder if this was how being a noble felt.

"Why are you doing this to me?"

Regina, who had abruptly been kidnapped by Artpe's party, had not resisted. She knew she couldn't run away, so she obediently sat next to them. She kept spouting words like 'incomprehensible' and 'I cannot understand'.

"You've shackled me. I cannot go against Aedia. It is cumbersome to keep me as a hostage. Why haven't you killed me?"

"I want to bring you into my party. That is why I can't kill you."

"You've shackled me."

Regina kept repeating the same words. It was as if she was trying to say, 'How can you not understand me at one go, you moron!' Artpe let out a bitter laugh.

"Yes, I already know. A restriction has been placed on you, right?"

"...that's right. Have you realized what I am?"

"Yes. Aren't you a golem?"

"Affirmative."

If a golem could defy its owner, no magician would want to make a golem. That was

why a magical shackles were placed over most golems. They couldn't defy their owners or specific candidates chosen by the owners.

The magicians didn't need an Innate Ability like the Demon King. It was possible to create these shackles during the process of creating a golem. Regina was probably talking about this.

"If you know I am a golem, why would you want me in your party...?"

"I want to know your own thoughts. Can you tell me what your thought are without the restriction influencing your answer?"

Artpe asked her a question. Regina slightly raised her head. There was a slight expression of puzzlement on her face.

"My personal thoughts aren't important. The restrictions are absolute. I follow Aedia."

"No, the important thing right now is what you think. That is why I'm not trying to persuade Aedia. I'm trying to persuade you"

"Your kidnapping of me is a form of persuasion?"

She was pretty astute in asking her questions, but Artpe let out a big grin as he shook his head.

"If we hadn't used hard measures, you would have run away. I want to keep you here, since I have to show you some stuff. I apologize for kidnapping you."

"If apologies were the be-all and end-all, we wouldn't need laws."

...it seemed her sense of self wasn't weak. It seemed she already had a firm sense of self. Artpe looked at her face with suspicion, but her face remained expressionless.

"I feel this is human foolishness. A golem is a golem. It is impossible to persuade one just by simply showing one a different perspective... additionally, a golem can only be a golem. My appearance was chosen for me. I look younger, but I'm not younger than you."

"...where did you hear such words?"

“I exercise my right to remain silent.”

Artpe smirked when he heard her reply. He turned his gaze away. Maetel was sitting next to him, and she was glaring at Regina with sharp eyes.

“I don’t like you.”

“A woman’s jealousy... it is ugly.”

“...I’ll kill you.”

Artpe clicked his tongue as he watched Regina and the hero bicker.

‘It seems I won’t be able to persuade her any time soon. Still, I accomplished the intended goal of depriving Aedia of its greatest power.’

It wasn’t up for debate. Regina was Aedia’s strongest card. Since Artpe had pocketed their strongest card, Aedia was probably in a state of panic.

From now on...

“I have to upend the table.”

“Ah. Oppa, you have pretty evil expression on your face.”

“You are quite observant.”

Artpe grinned as he replied.

“I was thinking about starting our Quest now.”

“Were all the Quests we’ve been doing up until now misdoings!?”

Chapter 89

Sleeping With the Enemy (2)

He really wanted to use consecutive Blinks to head towards his destination. His reservoir of magical energy was massive, but he couldn't use Blink with all of the knights in tow.

This was why Artpe tried hard to come up with an alternative traveling method. In the end, he had to match paces with the knights. In truth, he wasn't in a hurry. He actually achieved the original goal he had set for his party once they entered Aedia. They could spend half the journey traveling in a leisurely manner.

"We've discovered scouts. 11 o'clock. There are four of them. I want you to quickly get rid of them and rejoin the group."

"Understood, captain!"

...they had to travel with the knights, and they were messing up the fundamental reason why he was traveling in this manner! Artpe turned to look at his party members with a tragic expression on his face.

"Are you guys ok? Ah."

It seems Artpe had been worried for no reason. Maetel and Sienna was watching nature pass by through the window. They were smiling even as they saw men screaming and dying within their view of mother nature. This fact terrified him.

"Yes, Artpe! In truth, this is the first time I've ridden a carriage."

"Yes, I am well aware of that fact."

"The rattling makes it fun!"

His party had went through a lot of stuff during the past couple years. His party members were now able to block out things they didn't like. They were able solely focus and enjoy things they liked to see! Artpe seriously thought about where he went

wrong with them, but he had no answers.

This was why he switched his attention towards something he could do right now.

"I waited for the day when I would be able to take it easy like this... However, it was achieved much different than how I had expected."

"That is...?"

Regina couldn't escape the clutches of Artpe, and she couldn't take up on his offer of joining his party. At some point in time, Regina started maintaining her silence. However, her eyes slightly widened when Artpe took out a purple colored gemstone. Of course, he knew this object would catch her attention.

"This is the Demite's Gemstone."

"Demite..."

Artpe smirked as he answered her. A peculiar light remained within Regina's eyes. Was she deeply moved, curious or disappointed? Artpe couldn't tell.

"Demite. Aht."

She unconsciously reach out her hand. She finally came to her senses, and she tried to retract her hand. However, Artpe willingly pushed the gemstone towards her.

"Do you want to examine it?"

"...is it ok if I do so?"

"Yes. You are a magician. Of course, you won't be able to hold back."

"...yes."

Regina carefully extended her hand. She didn't touch Artpe's hand as she received the gemstone. She gently brought up the gemstone in front of her eyes. When she looked into the gemstone, one could see a galaxy of purple light nestled in her golden eyes.

"So this is a Demite..."

"Yes. It takes a long time to increase the purity of the Mana, and a minor miracle is needed to imbue the gemstone with a sense of self and a Class. All magician dream about possessing this lifelong partner"

"Demite..."

It seemed Artpe's words weren't registering with her. This was the first time Regina had met another Demite that wasn't her. She was extremely excited. She was observing the gemstone so closely that her nose was almost in contact with it.

"Demite... Demite."

Artpe let out a bitter laughter as he watched her. He didn't even need the Read All Creation ability. It was that obvious as to what her true identity was. As if she could sense his thoughts, Regina suddenly raised her head to talk to him.

"I am a golem. I am a golem made out of Demite."

"I sort of already knew."

"I possess a Class, and I am able to grow. It is possible, because I am a Demite."

Regina stopped speaking. She kept opening and closing her mouth as if she still had more to say. In the end, she just lowered her head.

"...I am a golem. I am a golem."

"Don't you have more you want to say?"

"A golem cannot escape the restrictions placed on it. Moreover, Demites are merely tools... the two of us are the same."

"So that is why it is useless to persuade you?"

"Affirmative."

Regina fidgeted with the Demite's Gemstone grasped within her hand. At one point, she put strength into her hand. She raised the Demite's Gemstone as if she had firmly made up her mind. However, she weakly dropped her hand in the next moment, and she handed the gemstone back to Artpe.

“...sense of self.”

“Hmm?”

It was unlike the voice that had always come out her mouth. A feeble voice flowed out from her.

“Why was I given a sense of self?”

“You are asking me a philosophical question.”

“I am not allowed to make any decisions. I have to do what my owner wants. My consciousness is there only for the use of my master. If that is true...”

“If that is true?”

“The gods... Did they make us for humans?”

“You are saying some interesting things.”

Artpe smirked. The gods made Demite for the humans? A being made out of Demite had said such words. It was quite ironic.

“Most humans aren’t able to live their lives as they want. I don’t know if the gods created the humans or the Demites. However, it seems you are under a disillusion. If a human hadn’t created you in this fashion, you wouldn’t be capable of having such thoughts.”

“I have no complaints about that fact. I merely had some doubts...”

Regina spoke further in a quiet voice.

“Countless things make up this world, yet if the humans desired it, they could have everything within this world. There are the rewards from the Dungeons, and the benefit they gain from Achievements. If a Demon King appears, a hero comes to humanity’s defense. The world is too... The world is centered around humans.”

“...”

“I’ve seen this world for the past 197 years. It is always the same. Nothing changes.”

Humans have given me orders, and I followed those orders. So..."

"So?"

"So... I..."

However, she couldn't speak. She determined that the words she wanted to speak would go against the restrictions placed on her. Regina looked like Etna. Etna hadn't been able to speak freely thanks to the shackles placed on her by the Demon King.

Regina changed the topic before Artpe could say anything.

"That is why I'm not younger than you. I am 198 years old in human years."

"So you are back to that again? It's fine?"

Yes, she was at her limits. Artpe snorted as he spoke.

"Lastly, I want to tell you about the critical delusion you are under."

"Delusion?"

"The relationship between a magician and a Demite isn't a dependent relationship. When a Demite exists in its gemstone state, it is merely a rock possessing a small amount of will. Magicians use this fact to refine and make a contract with the Demite. Basically, it is a form of a contract ritual. That is why you..."

"However, I am a golem. I am their subordinate."

"Hoong."

Artpe held the Demite's Gemstone in one hand, and he used the other hand to raise his long sword, which was letting out a soft red energy.

"When this guys is completed, you'll have a better idea of what I'm talking about. You can look forward to it."

"..."

The long sword was infused with the power of fire from Etna. It was a bit too large to

hold with one hand, but he didn't have a carving tool that was more suited for this job. He had no choice.

Artpe was careful not to poke a hole on the roof of the carriage. He firmly held onto the sword's hilt, and he used the side of the blade to carefully scratched at the outer surface of the gemstone.

"Oh. It's working."

A powerful flame formed at the edge of the blade. The Demite's Gemstone was unimaginably hard, yet the blade was able to carve out the parts he wanted by slightly melting the gemstone. Of course, these slivers from the gemstone still contained powerful Mana, so he saved the precious shavings.

"The Mana is..."

Regina's eyes slightly widened. The Demite was being refined by a minuscule amount, yet she could see the ambient Mana being sucked into the gemstone.

"In its Demite's Gemstone form, it only has the ability to amplify the injected Mana. However, you aren't like that, right? You are able to manipulate the Mana."

"Affirmative."

"Yes, this guy will be able to do the same thing... of course, it won't have a clear sense of self like you."

"...if its function remains the same, a sense of self is meaningless... it might be better that way."

Artpe didn't answer her. Instead, he went to work with his sword. It was a difficult and delicate work, so his working speed was slow. Still, he was able to work on it within the carriage. In just several hours, the light being emitted by the Demite's Gemstone steadily thickened. The amount of Mana being drawn inside the gemstone also increased.

"This gemstone has performed several exploits with me. Since it hadn't been fully awake, it wasn't able to receive its proper share of EXP..."

Despite this fact, the Demite's Gemstone had gained 100 levels from its original level.

It was proof as to what kind of carnage Artpe's party had to experience in the past.

"How is it? Can you see the change?"

"Slowly... It is awakening."

Regina watched Artpe's work. She observed the shape of the Demite's Gemstone change depending on the movement of his hands. She didn't like the fact that he was handling the Demite, yet she felt interested at the prospect of the Demite's awakening. Artpe thought she was a complicated being. Artpe continued his work as he had such thoughts.

The refinement of a Demite didn't happen in a day or two. Moreover, the situation he found himself delayed his work further. The carriage continued to run, but they had to take brief breaks. Moreover, they also had to stop for sleep.

Furthermore, other businesses continued to divert his attention away from his work of refining the Demite.

For example, magicians were starting to search the region. They were here to find Aedia's ace card... He had to kill these magicians in secret. Then there were the idiotic knights. They bared their teeths every time he tried to switch his mind off for a little bit. He had to personally teach several of them a lesson. Then there was Maetel and Sienna. It wasn't enough for him to interact with them several dozen times a day. They clung to him, and he had to set aside time to play with them.

Lastly, there was Regina. She knew running away was impossible, but she tried to escape every several hours as if she was trying to fulfill an obligation. Now he just shut down her attempts in advance. She complained, so he had to humor her too.

"...you already have a woman, yet you wander around searching for a new younger girl. A human's greed is endless."

"Ah. It isn't like that."

"Golems don't have a sexual function. Unfortunately, I cannot give you what you want."

"That is why I told you I don't need it!"

"...platonic relationship?"

“...”

It seemed Regina had learned the only way she could make fun of Artpe. He resented Sienna, who had taught this useless knowledge to Regina. However, Sienna continued to have an innocent smile on her face, and she said phrases like, ‘I’m glad oppa gets along with Regina!’ He should have foreseen this when he saw the two of them converse extensively with each other!

“Shit. This is hard to do.”

“It’s pretty.”

“It is getting prettier.”

[Nyaaaaaa.]

“It is close to waking up.”

After a week, an outline was becoming visible on the Demite. The Demite continued to absorb and emit the surrounding ambient Mana. This process caused a brilliant light to be emitted. Those that weren’t interested in his work started to pay attention.

The problem he was encountering was the fact that the Demite became harder as he carved deeper. This was why the speed of his work continued to slow down as time passed.

If possible, he wanted to finish it before they reached the headquarters of the Diatin army. As always, they arrived at their destination when he had only a little more to go to complete the

Demite.

“We are here, so you should get off... Why are you looking at me with such eyes?”

The blameless captain had opened the door to the carriage. Still, he received rebuke from Artpe and the members of his party. It couldn’t be helped.

“Your timing is impeccable.”

“Soon. It will happen soon.”

If it was up to him, he would have stayed in place to finish the Demite. However, it couldn't be helped. Artpe let out a sigh as he put away the Demite. Regina looked on with longing as she tried to catch sight of the gemstone again. Sienna gently pushed Regina to the side, and she gave a reply to the captain.

"Yes, let's go."

"I already sent a knight ahead, so he should soon..."

"Ggoo-ahhhhhhhhhk!"

Before the captain's words could end, a horrifying scream emanated from the enormous barrack within the headquarters. Artpe smirked as he asked the captain a question.

"Haven't I heard that voice before?"

"...it's the voice of my subordinate."

The corners of the captain's eyes became distorted. When he turned to look, he saw several hundred knights pour out of the barracks. They were filled with the intention to fight.

"Kill the traitors!"

"The leader of our enemies have infiltrated our headquarters! Kill every one of them!"

"Magician... What is going on?"

It was a wonder. Things were going exactly as he had expected. He faced the angry face of the captain. Artpe shrugged his shoulders as he answered the captain.

"So can you tell me who I'm supposed to make a deal with?"

Chapter 90

Sleeping With the Enemy (3)

The captain had brought allies that would allow them to win the war. The headquarters had responded by killing his subordinate, and they were being attacked by several hundred knights. The captain gawked at the sudden turn of events. However, Artpe wasn't considerate of what the captain was going through. He immediately grilled the captain.

"Who do I have to make a deal with?"

"What do you mean a deal? We don't have time to idly talk about such stuff. First, we have to resolve the misunderstanding..."

How could a man be so foolish? Artpe didn't hide his sneer.

"It would be great if we can resolve the misunderstanding. So... What do you want to say to those angry knights charging towards us? Your subordinate went to report our current situation. Are you going to say something that is markedly different from him?"

It was a mistake to call it a misunderstanding. This was why they couldn't resolve this so-called misunderstanding. If the other side wanted a different answer, he would rather pose a different question.

It would be a problem that would be easy for them to read.

"..."

"That is why I want you to answer my question. Who do I have to talk to amongst them?"

The captain was having a hard time replying to Artpe's words. In the end, he was able to spit out a short phrase.

"He isn't amongst them. He is in the barracks."

"All right. You guys wait inside the carriage. Maetel, you should be ready for a battle just in case."

"Yes!"

He left Maetel in charge of the party, then Artpe took a step forward. In a flash, he was in the midst of the charging knights.

"A powerful magician? Wartime mercenary? You brought someone here that is spouting such nonsense! Are you out of your mind!"

"If he's a magician, he is part of Aedia's forces! This is obvious! How can you fall for such an obvious lie... Uht!"

His movement was so natural that the knights didn't register Artpe within their midsts for a brief moment. A brief moment was all Artpe needed to carry out what he needed to do.

"I want you guys to stay here too."

Artpe lightly swung a single strand of Mana String across the floor. All the knights fell to the floor as both their legs were cut from under them. It didn't matter if the knights were charging towards or away from Artpe's party. Several hundred knights all fell to the floor.

"Koo-ha-ahhhhk!?"

"L... leg! My legs!"

"Stay put. If you struggle too much, you'll cause your wounds to break open. Naturally, it'll make it harder for me to reattach your limbs."

At Artpe's words, they quieted down as if they had been spooked by a ghost. He snorted as he headed towards the barrack. As if they knew Artpe had done something, the entrance to the barracks had reopened. Additional troops charged out of the barrack.

"Koo-ahhhhhhhk!"

They suffered the same fate as the ones that came out earlier.

"I just want a conversation."

[Nyaa nyaa nyaa-ah.]

"No, it isn't about my approach to the conversation. The problem is with their manners."

Several more knights ran out, but they stopped in place when they saw the other knights rolling on the floor with their legs cut off. Their faces had turned pale. At this point in time, Artpe had already neutralized 30% of the allied forces of Daitan and Tiata.

"H... how can this be?"

"I'm guessing your representative isn't in amongst you?"

No one answered Artpe's question. They just nodded their heads, and they opened the entrance to the barracks. The knights had already left in large numbers, so the barracks were quite desolate. There was a table placed at the end of the barracks, and there were several figures sitting at the head of table. These figures remained seated.

"They dare let an intruder enter this place. It seems we'll have to tighten discipline amongst the knights!"

Suddenly, one of them stood up. When Artpe surveyed him through his Read All Creation ability, he knew that the person was a level 230 knight. He was a marquis of the Daiatan kingdom, and at the same time, he was the general of the army. The one that was sitting at the head of the table was...

[Angelo Zard]

[Human]

[King]

[Level : 243]

The young king of Daitan faced Artpe as he opened his mouth.

“It seems you know who I am.”

“Yes, you are the king. However, you are quite interesting.”

Artpe was frank as he nodded his head. However, in the next moment, he tilted his head. Of course, the general had unsheathed his sword, and he was charging towards Artpe. However, Artpe didn't have a shred of interest in the man.

“The head of Daiatan is supposed to have a belly full of fat instead of muscles.”

Moreover, his greed had been as large as his fat belly. This was why the hero's party from his previous life had suffered when they crossed over to this continent. All the countries had tried to use the conflict between the Demon King and the hero to their advantage.

“You are correct. However, there was a change not too long ago. No, I made the change. A good opportunity had presented itself.”

A good opportunity?

Artpe tilted his head in puzzlement, but suddenly, a scene suddenly popped up inside his head.

Frate's auction and the incident with the Kraken felt as if it had happened not too long ago. It hadn't just been about Diaz. Many greedy people from many nations had crossed the ocean to come to Diaz, and they had suffered a disaster.

This was a change from his past. When Diaz hosted the large scale Frate's Festival, all the fat nobles had gathered in Frate, and the Lunatic Wave had completely sealed them in the city. Maybe, the other factions used this opportunity to...

“Get on your knees. How dare you speak like that to the absolute ruler of Daiatan! Ahhhhhhhhhht!?”

Artpe had been a bit surprised at the new information, and the general sensed an opening. He closed the short distance.

However, he couldn't even swing his sword against Artpe. He couldn't lay a finger on Artpe. As soon as Artpe entered the barracks, he had laid a trap with his Mana Strings. The general was tied up by the Mana Strings.

“Do you mind if I kill him?”

[Nyaa nyaa?]

“...I’d prefer it if you refrained from killing him.”

The king answered him. It was admirable. The king was trying to maintain an unperturbed expression, but he couldn’t hide the fact that one side of his smile had curled down. It was to be expected. The king hadn’t stopped his general in an attempt to get a gauge of Artpe’s powers. However, the general was neutralized too easily. He couldn’t bring out even a little bit of Artpe’s true skill.

“All right. I’ll go easy on him. However, I’ll take money as recompense for his insolence.”

“Koo-hahk!”

When Artpe flicked his finger, the Mana String around the general started to unwind quickly. However, this had the effect of flinging the general towards the direction he came from. He fell to the floor after hitting the wall of the barracks.

“Well, is anyone else going to stop me from speaking?”

“Let’s speak.”

The king had no other answer he was allowed to say. The king came to the same conclusion as the captain, who had fought Artpe earlier. Since he couldn’t control Artpe, he would try his best to stand on the same side as him. It seemed the king wasn’t only high in level. He wasn’t a dunce, with no brains at all.

Artpe let out a bright smile as he spoke.

“My offer is simple. I’ll help you crush Aedia. As recompense, I want you guys to fulfill my request.”

“The allied forces of Daitan and Tiata is already strong enough to vie for supremacy against Aedia. So why should I hire you as a mercenary?”

“There is the risk and the opportunity cost. If you hire me, you won’t have to sacrifice your soldiers, and it will consume much less time. I promise you that I’ll have this wrapped up in a week. You’ve seen me use my abilities, so you know what I’m saying

isn't impossible."

"I want to say one week sounds impossible. However... I cannot fathom the extent of your abilities, so I'll have to trust in your words."

The king agonized over his decision. For Artpe, it was enough that the king hadn't immediately rejected his words. Artpe was satisfied with his answer, so he continued to speak.

"In return, you'll have to agree to my small request. My request won't be burdensome if you aren't being too greedy."

"If so, I would have to hear what this request is first."

Mmmm. He was acceptable. As a ruler of a nation, He was quite splendid If he was like the ignorant kings from the old hero's tales, he would have gotten angry already. The kings from the old stories wouldn't have wanted to get their hand dirty, so they would have shouted at their soldiers to 'Catch that damn fool!' or some phrase like that. However, the king wasn't the problem right now. It was someone else.

"We no longer have to hear more from him, sir Zard. He possesses an obscene amount of magical energy. I'm sure he is with Aedia!"

"How can you say that, sir Eritard. If he was with Aedia, this war would have ended by now. He wouldn't go through all this trouble to talk with me. That is the biggest proof that he isn't with Aedia."

"King of Daitan!"

"Stop it. Let's hear him out first."

A man had been sitting on the opposite side of the general. He spoke to the king of Daitan as an equal, so his identity was easy to discern.

Artpe turned to look at him.

"Duke of Tiatia?"

"Ha. That's right. I am Duke Eritard. I am from the Dukedom of Tiata."

He hadn't suspected it before when he entered the barracks, but both the rulers of Daitan and Tiata were present inside. He was thankful, since he didn't have to travel to the Dukedom of Tiata. He asked his questions as he had such thoughts.

"I said I'm going to win the war for you guys, so why are you trying to undercut that deal? Are you really his ally?"

"You are powerful! What do you gain for allying with us!"

"What is it you want?"

"We want independence for our Dukedom!"

It was at that moment. Artpe followed up by shouting his own words after him!

"However, that is a feint! My true goal is the Forest of Eternity!"

"That's right! Soon we will... What!?"

The Duke nodded his head vigorously in agreement, but soon, his face stiffened. In a flash, question marks and exclamation points popped up inside his head. One didn't need to see inside his head to know what he was thinking.

"...Forest of Eternity? What is the meaning of this?"

"Uh. It is nothing, sir Zard. I just became so agitated that I agreed with his ridiculous words..."

"You spoke your real intention. So what's going to happen within the Forest of Eternity in the near future?... are you going to use the magic spell you prepared with Aedia over the years?"

"...!"

At Artpe's continued interrogation, the Duke's face turned white. If it was a simple lie, there was no reason why a ruler of a nation would be flustered by such words.

"H... how... That..."

However, Artpe's words struck home. It was information no outsider should have

known, yet he was speaking it out loud. It would have been strange if he hadn't reacted at all. However, Artpe's words continued to pour out.

"I know it all. Yes, you were probably the one that made the move on Daitan. You told the king of Daitan that you were pursuing your independence. It's a likely story, so Daitain joined forces with you to attack Aedia... However, your true intentions has nothing to do with independence. You intentionally started a war, so there would be a gap in the border defense. The Elves would take this opportunity to attack the Dukedom. You want to induce this scenario... You want to gain an excuse that you can use to 'justify' your actions."

In his past life, a calamity had occurred within the Forest of Eternity. The Elves wanted to regain complete freedom from the Dukedom of Tiata and Aedia. The Elves would use the war as an opportunity to assemble their forces. However, Aedia and the Dukedom of Tiata pounced on this opportunity as if they had expected the Elves to act that way. They brought their plan to fruition. In short order, they took complete control of the World Tree.

At the time, Aedia had received a lot of help from the hero, and the hero had trusted Aedia completely. This was why the feeling of betrayal had been enormous. In the end, she chose to fight with the Elves against Aedia.

This was the first incident where the hero had pointed her sword against a human organization... A single hero had brought down a kingdom with a rich history. Every nation became afraid of the hero, and they refused to assist the hero. It was the worst result for the hero.

After that incident, the hero's fights became difficult. If the magician hadn't joined her party, the hero's adventure would have come to an end.

However, events wouldn't turn out like that this time around.

"...sir Eritard?"

"N... no... It isn't like that, sir Zard!"

Artpe had already a completely understanding of what happened in his past life. Of course, there was a possibility that events would head towards the same path as his previous life. However, his conversation and contract with Mycenae was proof that things wouldn't head towards that direction.

"You had no intentions of attacking Aedia in the first place. Didn't Tiata draw you into this?"

"...you are right on that account. I rose to seat of power by causing a rebellion. I needed to divert the hate and resentment towards me to an outside source. Sir Eritard's offer was like a timely rain within a drought."

"That is why you retracted your suspicion and hesitancy. You took up his offer."

"Shut up!"

The Duke of Tiata realized Artpe had taken control of the narrative. He yelled out as he stood up. He looked as if he wanted to rip Artpe's lips in pieces, but unfortunately, he was much weaker even when compared to the king of Daitan. He was trash compared to them. The only thing he could do was make faces and shout in frustration.

The king of Daitan watched the Duke of Tiata, who couldn't keep himself in control from the frustration he felt. On the other side, there was Artpe. He possessed power, and he had an attitude that said, 'the powerful do not need to lie.' Artpe's words held more sway.

"I don't know or care about the Forest of Eternity. I do know the Elves live there, but that is the extent of my knowledge. So what you are saying is... The goal of the Dukedom of Tiata isn't their independence. You think their true aim lies within the Forest of Eternity."

"You should think about why that man is so flustered. Why would he react so negatively to a powerful being that would end the war quickly?"

A beginning of a smile on Artpe's lips deepened. He extended one hand, and he subdued the Duke of Tiata with his Mana Strings. The Duke became immobile.

"That bastard just wants to keep the 'war' going as long as possible. I've spell it out the situation to this extent, so you probably have a good idea of what is going on now."

"..."

As he traveled in the carriage, he had done more than just carve the Demite. He killed Aedia's magicians. He attempted to persuade Regina, and he played with his party members. Moreover, he had gathered information on the road, town and city. He

assessed what was going on in the war.

In the end, he came to a single conclusion. The war had been going on for five months, yet both sides were being passive. On top of that, the damage caused by the war had been minimal.

“Oh, most sublime magician. Let me ask you this.”

The king of Daitan, Angelo Zard, asked him a question.

“Do you have the ability to lead my kingdom to victory without the help of Tiata?”

“Will you believe me no matter what my answer is?”

“That...”

Artpe snorted as he spoke.

“Just follow me. I’ll let you see the truth with your own eyes.”

The king of Daitan was embarrassed to admit, but he was a bit intimidated by Artpe’s forceful words. Still, he had a presence of mind to realize that he had to answer the question presented to him by Artpe.

“...all right. Whatever you ask will less than the costs that will be incurred by Aedia. I will put my trust in you. I will follow you.”

“Deal.”

Artpe grinned.

It was the moment when the outcome of the war was decided.

Chapter 91

Sleeping With the Enemy (4)

“Foolish! How can you be so foolish!”

The Duke of Tiata stood up as he yelled out his words. He had witnessed someone spurn the alliance with another nation in favor of an individual. However, when he turned to look, the king of Daitan had an extremely peaceful expression on his face.

“What is foolish about it? I’m trying to lead our side to victory in this drawn out war. I tried my best to exclude all subjectivity when making this decision.”

“Do you really believe his words!?”

“Do I believe him? Even our alliance wasn’t based on absolute trust either. Isn’t that right? I think you are mistaken about something important, sir Eritard.”

Strength entered into the clenched fists of the king of Daitan. He had remained calm as Artpe entered the barracks. He maintained his calm even as Artpe sent the general flying. However, there was a slight heat in his voice now.

“I only believe in one thing. I believe in absolute power. If I’m forced to choose a side, of course, I’ll pick the magician. Isn’t it an obvious choice even from your point of view?”

“He is Aedia’s...!”

“Yes. Since you brought up the subject of whether I believe his words or not, you still haven’t come up with an excuse yet. What do you want from the Forest of Eternity? We’ve already come this far, so I hope you won’t give some dumb answer like you don’t know anything about it.”

The Duke of Tiata struck the table as he refuted the king’s words.

“I told you I have no connections to the Forest of Eternity! I won’t deny the fact that there are hostilities between the Elves and our people. However, that’s a separate

issue! We really are trying to fight for our own independence...!"

"If that is true, why were you trying to discard this magician? You bullishly accused him of being Aedia's magician, and you kept nitpicking him for no reason! If Aedia possessed a magician as strong as him, there is no way he would be unknown to us!"

Actually, there was a magician that fit that exact description outside the barracks. However, Artpe kept that to himself. It seemed the Duke of Tiata had the same thought as him, but if he spoke those words out loud, he would be admitting his allegiance to Aedia. He was caught between a rock and a hard place.

"That is... That is..."

The Duke of Tiata was about to open his mouth, but he decided to keep it shut. It would be great if he could pass this off with a likely excuse, but too much had been revealed earlier. The gap in his story would only widen the more he spoke. He was being bit from both sides by wolves, yet the only thing he could do was to spit out blood.

This was why he went with his remaining option. He had to stress the fact that the king of Daitan needed him. His expression turned cold as he spoke.

"Please think about it...! It would hard to hold the borders of Daitan if the soldiers of Tiata doesn't give support! Who cares if one has the most powerful weapon if one doesn't have a shield?"

"Ha. A shield..."

It seemed the Duke of Tiata's words had triggered a mine. The king of Daitan had been trying to keep his cool until the end, but this enormous mine blew away all his remaining patience!

"We can't just maintain the status quo. We've already held out for far too long. In the past five month, our progress have stalled. We are just going back and forth in an endless loop of retreating and charging. Since the pathway to the ocean is blocked by the Lunatic Wave, the plan was to bottle up Aedia from our side, and the side of Tiata. We were supposed to weaken Aedia by raiding them through the fall and winter. We were supposed to make them use up all their resources, yet that hasn't happened. Aedia seems to have felt no ill effects. Instead, my country is suffering! I have no choice, but to use special countermeasures!"

The attack on the port city of Belata was part of his special countermeasures. Daitan had reached its limit. This was why they broke the international law by sending their elite troops against Belata. It was a last ditch attempt to tilt the balance of war in their favor.

Even if they were able to secure the upper hand in the war, it was as if all their problems would have been solved. Daitan was already seen as the invader, and now his country would have caused civilian deaths. Daitan's future was dark even if they had won the war.

Despite this fact, the king of Daitan had pursued this course of action. It was proof that Daitan was truly in a bad spot.

Artpe asked him a question.

"Who came up with this plan in the first place? Who came up with this plan of pressuring Aedia to make it a war of attrition?"

"Sir Eritard suggested the plan, and I went along with it. In the end, it turned out like this."

The king of Daitan shook as he freely expressed his anger and a sense of powerlessness. When he heard those words, Artpe couldn't help but smirk.

Was the king's intelligence lacking compared to the strong power he possessed? Or did he put trust in the honor between men to establish the alliance? It didn't matter what had occurred. Either option had been endlessly foolish.

"Let's think this through. The ocean is not passable right now. The north and the western border was closed. No resources are able to enter into Aedia, so how are they able to hold out so well? Did they use their awesome power of magic to transport supplies?"

"You are talking about transporting supplies to feed an enormous army... Is it possible?"

"If they have hundred magicians like me, it is possible. However, if they were capable of such a feat, they would have just wiped out the capital of Daitan. Basically, there is no way they could have received supplies from an outside source."

It was one of the skills he had needed as one of the Four Heavenly Kings. It was the skill to play one side against the other! Words flowed out of Artpe like water as he made a persuasive argument. The king of Daitan's eyes turned sharper as he looked towards the Duke of Tiata. Since there was no possible way Aedia could receive supply from an outside source, that only left the Dukedom of Tiata. The Duke was supposed to be his ally!

“Bullshit! You and I came up with that plan in collaboration!”

The king of Daitan's gaze was so intense that he felt a tingle all over his body. The Duke of Tiata straightened himself as he yelled out. The king of Daitan nodded his head.

“I did agree with your plan. However, five months have passed, and this is the result of that plan. In your opinion, how do you think our enemies replenished their supplies? Please persuade me once again like before.”

“Sir Zard...!”

This was the end. There was suspicion but no evidence. However, the mood had decidedly shifted against him. He wouldn't be able to overturn this.

The words spoken by the king of Daitan was the decisive factor. Logic wasn't important right now. It was power. It didn't matter if the king believed the Dukedom of Tiata wasn't connected to Aedia. The king of Daitan had made a choice, and he wouldn't budge from it.

The Duke of Tiata grinded his teeth.

“Are you really going to look down on my Dukedom like this!? Are you confident that you won't regret this later on!”

“I'm already having regrets. I've risen to kingship through a rebellion. I was afraid of the public unrest, so I rushed into a war with another nation. Now my nation is at the brink of ruins, so I regret my decisions everyday.”

The king of Daitan wielded his words like a sword. At this point, his expression turned cold like a snow storm, and the tone of his voice changed.

“I couldn't let go of the only rope available to me, so I held onto a rotten rope. I couldn't get off this sinking ship, so I played out this abominable play several times. I kept going

through the three-act play to get to a resolution. I waited for it. However, the ship sunk, and I was on a ghost ship. I don't care if the rope is coated with shit. I'll hold onto it if it is new. I haven't lived this long by repeatedly making foolish decisions. I will do as I've always done!"

"All right. I'll show you that there is more to regret in this life! Even if you realize too late that you made the wrong decision, you won't be able to take it back!"

"You dare!"

The king of Daitan swung down a Mana infused towards the Duke of Tiata. It was merely a symbolic gesture that was meant to sever the relationship between the two nations!

"I'll definitely repay you for what you've done today... Uht!?"

"Eh-eet."

Artpe was proud that his skill of playing one side against the other hadn't rusted away from his days as the Four Heavenly King. He extended his hand toward the Duke of Tiata, who was taking a line out of the 'Required Reading for Villains on How to Exit in Style.'

A teleportation Artifact was being activated around the Duke of Tiata after the Duke fulfilled a specific condition. Artpe extended several dozen Mana Strings from his fingertips, and he wound it around the Duke. He prevented the Artifact from being used, and he pulled with his hand.

"What!?"

"Huht!"

The Duke of Tiata became surprised, and the king of Daitan, who had swung his word, also became surprised. He had swung his word in anger, but he never expected a leader of a nation not to dodge the blow. Unexpectedly, the king's sword cut the Duke of Tiata in half!

"All right. That takes care of Tiata."

"..."

He had killed his former ally, so the king of Daitan had an unbelievably uncomfortable expression on his face. He put his sword away as he turned towards Artpe. Artpe was retrieving the Artifact from the corpse. He had a delighted look on his face.

“This is an Artifact used for an emergency exit. It can only be used once. It’s my lucky day.”

“You really are... I am well aware of the fact that you possess overwhelming abilities as a magician... Hoo. So that is why...”

The king of Daitan pressed for an answer from Artpe, who was his ‘only’ ally left.

“I want to hear about your overall plan. I’m not deny the fact that you possess enormous power, but how can you end a war just by yourself?”

“You really don’t know much about what magicians are capable of. You were quite lucky in being able to cut down your former ally.”

“Unfortunately, our country doesn’t have any outstanding magicians. Also, I hadn’t liked him in the first place.”

Basically, he was saying a good excuse had shown up, so he had taken the initiative. Artpe was a bit dumbfounded by his answer. He replied back.

“Just keep in mind that I have a Great magic spell that can bring the capital of Aedia to its knees. There is no need to cause a bloodbath by attacking the periphery of Aedia. It’ll be annoying. If we are to conquer Aedia, we’ll have to worry about the civilian population. It isn’t as if Daitan has an unlimited number of troops. I don’t want a lot of blood to be shed.”

It was words that shouldn’t be coming out from the mouth of a former Four Heavenly King. However, he had completely left behind his former self in his present life!

This didn’t mean he would go running around pursuing peace as a hero. However, the king of Daitan didn’t focus on his words. He was still busy trying to gauge the power of Artpe’s magical energy and spells.

“A Great magic spell that can guarantee the downfall of the capital... I have no choice, but to trust in you. All right.”

It seemed he had finished his calculations. He raised his head to lock eyes with Artpe. There was a twinkle in his eyes.

“Let us go to the capital at full speed. What about your party?”

“They are probably yowling by now. They’ll come looking for me soon. Let us gather here once again after three hours. I want you to gather couple dozen of your core troops.”

“Couple dozen sounds too little...”

“It’ll be easy. I’ll bring down Aedia with my power. However, it is up to you and your people to seize the capital.”

The king of Daitan wondered if he had been wise in hiring Artpe. However, the milk had already been spilled. He cleared the bitter taste in his mouth as he asked a question.

“I still haven’t heard the most important component of this venture. What is your request?”

“Ah. That’s right. I haven’t told you that yet.”

It had been so hectic that he had forgotten to relay that information. Artpe let out a bitter laugh as he spoke.

“It is about the Forest of Eternity. I want you to leave that place alone.”

The king waited for a while, but Artpe no longer said anything. When he realized that was the entirety of Artpe’s request, the king asked in a baffled manner.

“...is that really it?”

“It won’t be an easy request. People won’t stop just because you said so. That is why this is only a rough overview of my request. When the war ends, I want you to safely absorb Aedia and Tiata into your kingdom. Then I want you to make a new law. I want you to make it so that people won’t cause harm to the Forest of Eternity.”

It was as Artpe had said. This wouldn’t be an easy request. Money and Artifacts were a one time payments. On the other hand, this request had to be upheld as long as the

kingdom of Daitan existed. Still, Artpe's help would allow Daitan to conquer both Aedia and Tiata. There was no way the king would balk at this price.

“...are you perhaps a descendant of the Elves?”

The king had been prepared to give away parts of Aedia or Tiata. He couldn't hide his dismay as he asked the question.

Artpe answered him.

“Nope. This is just a Quest for me.”

Chapter 92

Sleeping With the Enemy (5)

When Artpe exited the barracks, the large number of legless knights weren't present. Instead, the captain stood waiting for him. He was the one that had guided Artpe's party to this place.

"W... what... What happened?"

"Just go in. I think he might promote you."

"That means..."

At Artpe's reply, a healthy glow returned to the captain's face. He belted out his official rank and name before he entered the barracks. Artpe shrugged his shoulders as he watched the captain's back. When he approached the carriage, his party members had remained in the same position as when he left the carriage. They were on standby.

"Did everything go well, Artpe?"

"Of course. Ah. Also, Regina..."

"The distance between us cannot be lessened by calling out to me in a familiar manner."

"..."

Artpe thought about hitting her, but he firmly pressed down on that desire. While they traveled to this place, she had revealed her name to him. He had thought she had opened a little bit of her heart to him. It seemed Artpe had been foolish for having such thoughts.

"You can have this."

Artpe didn't go out of his way to dispute her words. He extended his hand towards her. Regina was leery and suspicious. She reluctantly raised one hand as if she had no

choice in this matter, and she took the item given to her.

Her expression went through a rapid change.

“This is... Why?”

It was the emergency escape Artifact he had stolen from the Duke of Tiata. Of course, the destination picked by the Duke of Tiata was at the heart of the Dukedom of Tiata.

Artpe’s proficiency in using the Mana Strings was increasing daily. He hadn’t needed to destroy the Artifact. It had been possible for him to temporarily neutralize the Artifact, and it allowed him to recover the Artifact intact.

For some reason, he was giving the Artifact to Regina, who was his captive! Regina was so taken aback that she stopped moving after she received the Artifact. Artpe thought she looked pretty funny. He continued to speak.

“I met the Duke, and I got it from him. It was a fortuitous turn of events, and I’m giving this to you.”

“Duke...?”

She unconsciously blurted out her reply, and her expression stiffened. Artpe was openly against Aedia. If the Duke was inside the barracks, Artpe had probably met the Duke, and...

“Is the Duke dead?”

“Yes.”

“Discouraged. I couldn’t stop it. The Duke is one of the people with authority over me. My negligence led to my owner’s death.”

It was odd. There was an expression of despair on Regina’s face. She lowered her head. The fact that she was obsessed with her orders did make her look like a golem... Well, it seemed she was still mistaken about a key fact. Artpe smirked as he spoke.

“There is no one except the Duke that can give you orders within the Dukedom, right?”

“Affirmative.”

"That means no one can order you in the short term if you use the Artifact to travel to the Dukedom."

"When I'm freed from my master, I have to immediately return to Aedia. I have no freedom. It is a foolish belief."

Regina looked truly taken aback by all of this. Artpe put on a kind smile as he spoke to her.

"Your spells are all attack and control type magic. Even if you use your stupidly large reservoir of Mana, it'll take you a week to reach Aedia from Tiata. I'll have all of this wrapped up if you take over a week to get there."

"...how do you know about my Skills?"

"I have an observation Skill."

In truth, it was his Innate ability. Regina had become surprised when he hit the nail on the head with his remarks. She nodded her head as she readily accepted his explanation.

"Affirmative. I cannot return to Aedia in the allotted time. That is why you won't suffer any tactical loss by giving me this item... However, you also gain nothing from doing this. Why?"

Why was he allowing her to go to Tiata? If he wanted her to become his party member, he should be trying to keep her next to him. Why did he bring her all the way here just to let her go?

It was an obvious question to ask, and Artpe answered her.

"It's because I have a favor to ask of you."

"...understood. You are an idiot. You are incapable of making rational decisions."

Artpe ignored Regina's insults as he continued to speak.

"I don't care if you return to Aedia. You'll be starting your journey from Tiata. Even at your fastest speed, you won't be able to affect the situation in Aedia. Isn't it so? Since you can't change anything, I would like you to go to Aedia in a roundabout way. I would

like you to pass by the border of the Forest of Eternity."

"A roundabout way..."

Regina had been about to ignore Artpe's words. She was about to activate the Artifact. She tilted her head. Artpe nodded his head as he spoke.

"There is something there that you have to see for yourself. You'll change after seeing it."

His words finally made her realize that Artpe hadn't given up trying to persuade her. At that moment, a strange feeling bloomed within her heart. She denied it by shaking her head from side to side.

"...golems do not change. We only change in level."

"Do you really think that?"

"Golems follow their owners. Once a golem is separated from the owner, the golem finds and returns to its owner."

Regina spoke as if this was an established fact. However, she hesitated a little bit after speaking those words. She nodded her head, and she made an additional remark.

"I'll take the roundabout way to prove this fact."

"In the end, you are accepting my request."

"Detestable."

A small amount of her will was infused in her glare as she gripped the Artifact given to her by Artpe. For some reason, she turned to look at Sienna before the Artifact activated.

It was understandable. Artpe had been the one to imprison her. Maetel had stuck close to Artpe, and she had been vigilant against Regina. The only one she had the opportunity to form an attachment was Sienna. As expected, Sienna didn't fall short of Regina's expectations. Sienna had a bright smile on her face as she waved her hand.

"See you soon, Regina."

“...I won’t be coming back.”

Even as Regina spoke those words, there was a sliver of a smile when she heard Sienna’s words. Maetel snorted when she saw this.

“That’s right. Don’t come back. Never come back.”

“You are going to catch their stupidity. You should escape before you are infected.”

Regina kept saying silly things until the end. The emergency exit Artifact activated in an instant, and Regina left. She was transported from the headquarters of Daitan to Tiata in an instant.

“Hoo. This should wrap things up for the time being.”

Artpe let out a sigh as he looked at the empty seat. Maetel was also looking at Regina’s empty seat. She suddenly called out his name.

“...Artpe.”

“Huh?”

“Artpe usually acts on logic rather than feeling, right?”

“That’s right?”

“From the beginning to end, why are you trying to appeal to her emotions?”

Artpe stopped for a brief moment, but soon, he smirked as he turned to look at Maetel.

“In what way have I been appealing to her emotions?”

“Regina said she was a golem, yet you continue to treat her as a human with free will.”

“That’s because she possesses free will?”

“...yes, I see.”

Maetel didn’t show much surprise at his answer. She nodded her head. It was the same for Sienna. It seemed they had roughly known what was going on from the start. Her

questions to Artpe were merely confirming her suspicions.

“Oppa. Regina isn’t a golem, right?”

Sienna asked the question. Artpe mulled it over for a brief moment. He decided it would be best to tell them the truth in advance if they were going to bring Regina into their party.

He calmly gathered his thoughts, then he spoke.

“Yes. If she is a golem, the magical engineering field will have to change their definition.”

It was true that the magicians had created a miracle.

The Demite could grow and use magic, but it possessed no vitality. However, it possessed a firm will, and the magicians used this will as a background to give it a body that can be used.

However, they were mistaken about one thing. It was the fact that they hadn’t created a golem with the Demite. In the end, golems were tools that always followed the orders of their masters.

Regina possessed independent consciousness, so how could she be a golem?

It was a bad joke. Currently, Regina was a Demite that had acquired a body. She wasn’t someone more or someone less than that. In fact, she was closer to being a human than a golem. No, it was more apt to say she was of a humanoid race that was infinitely similar to a human.

“It probably took countless trials and errors. They probably spend unbelievable amount of resources to create a body that can accept a Demite in its entirety. I applaud them for succeeding. However, that was all they were able to do. They couldn’t control her. They tried putting in control measures that would have worked on a golem, but it didn’t work. That is why they used the magic of suggestion.”

“Suggestion...”

“Yes, it was the power of suggestion.”

Suggestion.

Regina had shown off this skill before. It was a type of magic that stimulated the opponent's mind. It made the subject naturally trust and follow the caster's words. Regina had nonchalantly hypnotized several thousand humans, yet she was hypnotized herself too. It was an amusing situation.

"When her body and mind was immature, the magicians continuously placed restrictions on her. They told her other golems acted in a certain way, so she had to act in the same way as the golems. They planted the idea that she would be in big trouble if she went against them. They told her she wasn't capable of doing certain things, and she must follow only them. Countless suggestions were layered on top of each other, and these suggestions became absolute restrictions in her mind."

"She originally had free will, but the suggestions..."

They hadn't been with Regina for a long time, but it was clear to them that she wasn't living a free life. She had to swallow her words, because she couldn't speak certain words that were forbidden to her. She had sporadically tried to escape, and he had also seen her repeatedly perform specific actions as if she was doing it out of obligation.

The only reason why she had conversed with Artpe's party was the fact that his party was too powerful for her. Normally, she never conversed with strangers.

She conducted missions given to her by her 'master.' After returning from her mission, she trained in magic, and she leveled up. She lived her life by repeating this cycle.

How could she have time to converse with others?

Of course, this was why the way she spoke was weird.

"...they are really bad people."

Maetel came to a decision as to what was right and what was wrong. She no longer looked guarded when talking about Regina. Again, Sienna had a different reaction from Maetel. She became angry.

"They are really bad. I want to punish all of them."

"Don't worry. I'll be punishing all of them."

Artpe had expected such a response, so he replied in an apathetic manner. At that moment, Maetel asked him a question in an argumentative manner. Of course, he had expected this question too.

“Why didn’t you tell her this, Artpe? You had plenty of opportunities.”

“I had captured her as an enemy. Do you think the suggestion spell will break just because I spoke to her? It might have caused the spell to gain a firmer footing within her.”

“Then...”

“That is why I sent her to Tiata.”

Originally, he had planned on wiping out the group of people that were called her ‘masters.’ Afterwards, he would have slowly unravelled the suggestions ingrained within her. However, something unexpected had happened. He had gained a ticket from the Duke. The Artifact would allow him to send Regina to Tiata. His task became easier.

“She might be hurt more in the short term, but this method will allow her to heal faster... also this will allow us to lessen the damage caused to others.”

“You want her to come to the Forest of Eternity, right? What’s there, Artpe?”

A bitter smile formed on Artpe’s lips.

“It’s something we have always seen. It doesn’t matter where one goes. The outward appearance of human greed can be changed, but it just lurks beneath the surface.”

At that point, Maetel and Sienna accepted his words, and they backed off. Artpe let out a sigh of relief when he saw this. The two of them were focused on Regina, so he was able to give an evasive answer.

However, Maetel’s observation was correct. For some reason, he had been empathetic towards Regina.

The fact that she wasn’t a golem didn’t fully explain his behavior. When dealing with Regina, he relied on an unconvincing possibility. He had been way too soft on her. Of course, he acted this way even knowing that there was a possibility she wouldn’t

become a member of his party.

Regina had been shackled for the past 200 years just because she was born through the hands of magicians. In his past life, he had been bound by the Demon King. He felt an unbelievable amount of anger when he saw Regina, who was bound without her knowledge. She had done nothing wrong. He couldn't let it be.

He had plenty coercive measure he could have used to completely bring down the Demon King. It would have allowed him to live a comfortable life into his old age. However, he hadn't done pursued these course of actions.

Maybe, he had tried to come find Regina as soon as possible, because of this following reason.

'I'm the personification of irrationality. I'm acting selfish by only being sympathetic towards beings that are in a similar plight as me. Who did this? Who the hell revived a lowlife demon into a hero?"

Still, there was nothing he could do about what had occurred. This was his life now. He let out a bitter laugh as he watched his party members firm their resolves to invade Aedia. He stopped thinking about such thoughts as he took out the Demite's Gemstone. As if to say she understood his feeling, Roa let out a short meow.

Artpe snorted.

"I still won't give you this, you dork."

[Nyaa.]

On that night, Artpe was successful in refining the Demite.

The party departed with the king of Daitan, and the select elite soldiers chosen by him. They headed towards the capital of Aedia.

Chapter 93

Forest of Eternity (1)

In truth, Artpe didn't really like riding horses. In his past life, he had led a life that was embarrassingly devoid of much physical activities. Moreover, he hadn't developed any amicable relationships with other creatures in his past life.

"Heeeeeeng!"

"Stop lick me! Stop licking me!"

This was why his current predicament was all the more unfamiliar. Since they had to travel at top speed with the knights, he had no choice but to accept the war horses prepared for his party by Daitan. For some reason, the horses were very complaisant in Artpe's presence.

"They really are all over you, Artpe... are they females?"

"I checked. The horses are male. Moreover, you of all people shouldn't be saying that."

These were horses trained by the throne. They were trained to accept and follow orders from all riders, yet they shouldn't be this obedient. The horses were almost gleeful in following Maetel and Artpe. It was only happening to them. At some point, Artpe realized he had been instinctively using one of the hero's abilities.

'... still, I hope they don't discover that I am a hero because of this.'

In truth, he had become strong enough, so he didn't need to hide the fact that he was a hero. However, he was leery of openly carrying out the work of a hero when one considered that the Demon King's army was on the move.

'Oh well. If I carry out the work of a hero, there will come a time when I'll clash directly against the Demon King's army. It might not matter even if I reveal myself. Everything is turning out differently from my past life. If I take that into account, the Four Heavenly Kings should be mobilizing by now. Ah. Still, I would like to delay going to the Demon world until I resolve everything on this side. I doubt things will go as

smoothly as I want... ’

“Magician. If you don’t know how to ride a horse, would you like to ride behind me?”

Artpe had been going through his thoughts while he was being licked by his horse. The king of Daitan tried to get ahold of Artpe. Artpe had been waiting for the offer, so his face brightened as he was about to take up on the offer. However, Maetel let out an unabashed laughter as she grabbed Artpe’s arm.

“You can ride behind me, Artpe.”

“You’ve also never ridden a horse.”

“I think I can ride it.”

It was true! She had never learned how to ride a horse. However, she handled the horse as well as the knights after forcing Artpe to sit behind her. Sienna also was doing well on a horse, and this caused Artpe to feel aggrieved.

“I’m sure I can ride a horse by myself.”

“Not a chance.”

However, his pride as a man crumbled under the hero’s personal desire. There was no way Maetel was going to let Artpe go.

“I’m fine if we stay this way forever!”

“I’m sorry, but centaurs are not my cup of tea.”

Artpe gave a cold reply as he let out a sigh. Sienna was riding along right next to them on her horse. On the other side, the king rode his horse. The knights surrounded them like an honor guard.

“This is a great formation if we want to be killed by a bombardment from the magicians.”

“In truth, we’ve used this method throughout the war. We thought we could overrun our enemies by attacking in a bunched formation...”

"Did you really think you could just mow down magicians through strength? It is such a knuckleheaded approach. I can see why you've been tricked by the Duke of Tiata for so long."

"...you are my ally, but you really are impudent."

Daitan was surprisingly inadequate in their ability to deal with magicians. It seemed they had relied on Tiata to take care of the magicians. They had chosen the worst possible option.

"We are traveling at such a slow speed. Are you sure we'll be able to be within Aedia in a week?"

"These are all war horses that are above level 80. You don't have to worry too much about it."

"So there are no problems with the horses."

That left the gears. Artpe thought over it for a brief moment. He nodded his head as he spread both his hands. The magical energy sleeping within his body boiled out of him, and it spread into the surrounding.

"Hoo-ooh... Go."

"Artpe?"

Maetel tilted her head when she sensed him activate his Mana. In the next moment, Artpe's magical energy surrounded the war horses, who were fiercely galloping down the road. To be precise, his magical energy surrounded the saddles and horseshoes. When the king and the knights realized that Artpe had activated his Mana, they flinched as they turned their heads to look at Artpe.

"What magic did you just use?"

"It wasn't magic. It's a skill. You'll find out soon."

Artpe had activated a skill called Reinforcement. It wasn't the permanent Reinforcement he had used up until now. It was a Reinforcement that temporarily boosted the performance of objects. Artpe's Reinforcement skill could do everything. It was a multifaceted skill!

The temporary Reinforcement used far less Mana compared to the permanent Reinforcement, and unlike the permanent Reinforcement, the temporary Reinforcement was great for casting simultaneously. It also left no traces behind after expiring. It allowed one to use it indiscriminately and without much thought. That was its advantage. It was perfect for this situation.

'Let's see... '

He reinforced the horseshoes. It caused the horse to be less tired, and it affected the leg muscles. It allowed the horse to run faster and longer. Then he Reinforced the saddle. It replenished the vitality of the person sitting on the saddle.

The saddle and the horseshoe had a symbolic meaning and Record. He used his power as a mage to make these items into what they were in the present reality Artpe Reinforced the gears equipped by several dozen horses, and he was successful in creating temporary Artifacts.

"The horses have become noticeably faster! How is this possible?"

"My god. I'm sitting on a horse running at full tilt, yet it is so comfortable! It is as if I'm sitting on top of a bed!"

Soon, everyone spoke out in admiration. Artpe's triumphant expression made him look slightly douchey, but it was true that he had increased the party's speed by 20% with a wave of his hand. Moreover, he had alleviated the discomforts caused by the travel. The king looked at Artpe with new eyes.

"Do all magicians possess such a variety of abilities?"

"No, I'm the only one."

"Oh oh. You really are a douche."

"You'll regret those words soon."

Artpe snorted as he spread both hands. When the king saw this sight, he yelled out in surprise.

"Are you going to use it one more time!?"

“Nope.”

About half of Artpe’s Mana had exited his body, and it was tossing around his body. It was an overwhelming amount of Mana considering it was an amount possessed by a single individual. The Mana was refined for the use of the Reinforcement skill, and it surrounded the party once again. Once. Twice.

“M... my god...!”

The king’s face crumbled from the shock he felt. A deep smile formed on Artpe’s lips.

“I didn’t use it once. I used it twice.”

“You really are a douchey...!”

Even if Artpe possessed massive amount of Mana, he had simultaneously Reinforced the saddles and horseshoes of couple dozen horses. He had done it three times, so he had used 80% of his Mana. He panted as he leaned against Maetel’s back. He asked her a question.

“What do you think.”

“I like the feel of you leaning against me from exhaustion, but I’d rather want you to hug me in a loving way.”

“No, I’m not talking about me. I’m talking about the speed, you dork.”

“Mmm. I think we are moving about three times faster.”

Even if it was only a temporary Reinforcement, he had casted it three times in a row. A flow of Mana that had caused rapid changes had swept through, and there was no way such a change would be temporary.

The saddles and horseshoes on the war horses shone with a red metallic sheen. Their gears had turned into a low rank Artifact. Even when the duration time of the Reinforcement came to an end, the effect on a single Reinforcement would be left behind permanently.

“A magician is capable of calmly doing things that are unimaginable to us.”

“It really is a bloodcurdling amount of power. It makes me want to idolize him.”

“There was a time when I wanted to become a magician in my youth...”

The king and his knights sang Artpe’s praises as they cut through the winds. The men of the north went nuts over being able to travel at such high speeds! On the other hand, Maetel looked miffed as she rode her horse in rhythm.

“...one week is too short.”

“Be quiet, dummy.”

Thanks to Artpe’s unexpected support, the party was able to charge towards the capital of Aedia at a ridiculous pace. It was befitting to call them a strike force.

The performance and endurance of the horses and men were improved to the extreme. It wasn’t a joke to say that they were moving three times as fast as their initial speed.

On the other hand, how could they avoid notice when a party of men on their horses were speeding through a region embroiled in war?

Aedia boasted a magical communication system that reached the entirety of its nation. They boasted an information network that was considered to be the best amongst all nations. This was why an elite force of magicians escorted by soldiers were mobilized to stop Artpe’s party.

“Stop!”

“It seems you’ve finally lost your mind from the stress caused by the war. You’ve crawled into the heart of Aedia. Haven’t you realized the might of Aedia after being abused for the past five months?”

Of course, they were on the road, so the royal magicians wouldn’t be here. However, they did send a first wave of magicians. They were capable of space magic and deterrent magic. While the first group stalled their enemies, another group of magicians would use their attack magic on them. That was supposed to be the plan...

“Magician, they are...”

“I know.”

The magicians that appeared in the distance made the ground smooth, and they raised earthen walls to stop the charge of Artpe’s party. When Artpe confirmed with his Read All Creation that the magicians were nearby, Artpe lightly swung his hand, and all the spells were made useless.

“Koo-hahk!?”

“T... the Mana...! W... we have to report this to the throne... Kah-hahk!”

In a flash, the magician were overpowered, and they realized a much powerful magician was present on Daitan’s side. They tried their best to relay this information to the throne, but the attempt was thwarted. In an instant, Artpe was victorious.

His skill level was high, so he was able to cause physical and magical effects at great distance. He could extend his Mana Strings for couple kilometers. Of course, he wouldn’t wait for his enemies to use their Artifacts or magic!

“K... koohk. He is using perception magic! I have no idea what magic spell he is using!”

“Idiots! Attack the magician!”

“We aren’t in range! Moreover, something is breaking up the Mana itself... Kahk!”

Only a very few high level people had the capacity to see the several hundred strands of Mana Strings in the air. At Artpe’s will, the Mana Strings cut, smash and erased anything that opposed Artpe. Maetel had a knowing smile on her face as she mumbled to herself.

“In the end, you are using Mana Strings?”

“Are you complaining?”

After acquiring the Mana String, the spell had pretty much become Artpe’s middle name. In the past year, Artpe purposefully chose to use the Mana String spell when other spells would have been sufficient.

The reason being the Mana String was versatile. However, it also had to do with the event that had occurred in his fight against the Ancient Kraken. A Unique skill had

strengthened the spell, yet no tangible effect had been seen. Basically, it had fired a blank, yet Artpe didn't think this was the case.

'Still, I haven't seen much change from it.'

The Unique spell was made in such a way that he couldn't thoroughly observe it through his Read All Creation ability. It had an element of chaos that couldn't be specified.

In the past year, his spell had gone from level 60 to being at the cusp of level 70, yet he couldn't say that he was able to perfectly handle this spell.

"A... amazing. He killed so many magicians in an instant...!"

"Oh oh oh. Our magician is invincible! Invincible!"

"Magician! Magician!"

Aedia's magician had always fucked over Daitan, yet these magicians had died so easily by Artpe's hands. The knights of Daitain were hot blooded. They sang Artpe's praise in joy. It seemed they had completely forgotten about what they had suffered under Artpe's hands not too long ago.

"You are amazing, magician! At this pace, it'll be possible to take over the palace within four days!"

"We are moving noisily through this region. Aren't you worried that the enemy will harden their defense when they hear about us?"

"In my opinion, you are purposefully revealing our presence..."

"...yes, you aren't wrong."

As expected of someone that was occupying the kingship of a country, he had a good sense. Artpe grinned when he heard the king's words. Artpe acknowledged it.

"I'm trying to taunt them as much as possible. I want to make them so angry that they'll bring in all kinds weapons into the capital. On the other hand, we can't give them too much time, or they'll come up with a different plan."

“What... What do you plan on doing in the capital?”

He had wanted someone to ask that very quest. The king's timing was impeccable.

Artpe grinned as he replied.

“It'll be this world's dirtiest and fanciest festival.”

Exactly a day and a half passed.

Artpe's party able to see the capital of Aedia with their eyes.

Chapter 94

Forest of Eternity (2)

“Hoo. I see it.”

“...we really can see it. I still can’t believe it.”

They had destroyed everything that was in their way. At times, they took a short break, and they had to heal their horses. However, they were able to reach the capital of Aedia in just two days.

If a trained war horse ran its fastest speed on minimal break, the estimated arrival time had been one week. The current result was like a smack on the nose to the king of Daitan.

“We should slow down soon, your majesty! I can see the enemy force!”

“Wow. I’ve never seen so many magicians gathered in one place!”

Aedia had sent multiple small elite units towards Artpe’s party one after another, but they determined a small force couldn’t stop the progress of Artpe’s party. They even attempted to use a spell that would have incinerated a small territory. However, the spell was stopped before it could be activated. It was decided the powers within the capital had to be mobilized.

Aedia had sent out magicians to ascertain the extent of power possessed by Artpe’s party, but they had lost contact with all the magicians. This was why the only thing known about Artpe’s party was its size.

It was also the reason why they had declared this the worst crisis since the founding of Aedia as a nation.

They gathered everyone that was capable of using magic to face their enemy! The quantity of magicians that could be thrown at their enemies was something only the magic kingdom of Aedia could do.

The only problem that remained was the fact that they were having a hard time evacuating the civilians. It was to be expected. At the guidance of Artpe, Daitan's troops had arrived in just two days. It hadn't been too long since Aedia had realized the seriousness of the problem they faced. Two days was too short of a time to finish their preparations.

"The defense facilities installed all over Aedia are too good that they've never experienced their capital being ransacked by enemy forces. Of course, they have a procedure to deal with an attack on the capital. They possess evacuation sites."

Artpe gave a running commentary to his party as they watched the capital, which had turned upside down from the impending attack from an enemy force. The magicians were all gathered, and the civilians within the city were running about in confusion. It was a funny sight.

"Artpe, do we have to kill the civilians?"

Maetel bit her lips as she spoke. Artpe grinned as he shook his head from side to side.

"I decided to go straight towards the capital, because I wanted to minimize civilian casualties. So why would I order you to do something like that?"

"But Artpe... I can feel an enormous amount of Mana from the capital. If we clash against them, how can we not cause harm to the civilians...?"

"What do you mean by clash against them?"

"Huh?"

Artpe's reply was unexpected, so Maetel tilted her head. The fact that he wasn't going to attack civilians weren't the important part. He was stating that he would bring everything to a halt before he would have to fight the enemy force! When the king of Daitan heard their conversation, he questioned Artpe in disbelief.

"Is there a way to subdue our enemies without clashing against them?"

"Well, they are getting ready to fight to the death, so why should we get bloodied by charging straight into them...? I won't be affected, but a lot of your knights will be killed."

“However, you baited them into making those preparations...?”

The king of Daitan had an expression on his face that said he was ready to shed a bowl or two of blood for victory. Artpe smirked when he saw this.

“I told you that this would be the world’s dirtiest and fanciest festival. It won’t be much of a festival if someone dies...”

“A war where countless people die en masse is a festival. If not, what else could it be?”

“Nope. You guys don’t have to do anything. I’ll show you myself.”

This was what was wrong with muscle-brained knights. Artpe clicked his tongue as he used a spell. His body floated into the air.

“I’ll be going first. You guys should follow me at a slower pace. You can be at ease. I’ll take care of the magicians along the way.”

There were spells that all magicians learned at an early stage. For some reason, Artpe had been very unlucky, and he hadn’t been unable to learn some of these spells until he had passed level 250. One of these spell was the Float spell.

In truth, a magician of Artpe’s level should have learned the Flight spell by now. No, it was more befitting for him to use teleportation spells at his level. However, movement type spells refused to drop for him. This was why he was thankful for the fact that he was able to learn the Float spell.

In the end, he could only put his trust in Mycenae now. However, he hadn’t met her in awhile, because he had been playing underwater. When he solved the Forest of Eternity quest for her, he would use it as leverage to acquire spell books from her. He planned on being forceful in his request.

“Thankfully, I have the Float spell. As expected, looting is worth doing.”

“Didn’t you just steal the items from the magicians you captured as prisoners? You were just lucky that the spell books were in their possession...”

Several amongst the magicians had possessed spell books. It was common for magicians to come across spell books they had already learned.

It was logical to sell or give the spell book to someone else. However, most magicians hid the spell books or they carried it around in their possession.

Some did research on the spell books or they kept it as a memento. It was, because there was a chance their competitors might get stronger if these spell books became available to them...

Magicians were innately ostentatious, and they were small-minded.

Anyways, that's how it was.

"Well, it's time for me to move out."

"Artpe, you shouldn't do dangerous things."

"I'm not. I'm not doing anything dangerous."

He planned on using a mere Float spell to fly to the capital, yet Artpe was confident. If one could see the Mana Strings roiling around him, one would be inclined to believe his confidence.

"Oppa, do we have to do anything specific?"

"You just have to make sure to protect our employer so he doesn't die. At a certain point in time, all the magicians inside the capital will be facing a massive amount of chaos. It is easy to become distracted in such a situation, so you have to be vigilant."

"Yes..."

"Since this spell will guarantee to bring the capital to its knees, I'm sure it will cause a big commotion. However... There are so many people gathered in the capital. Are you sure you can bring them to their knees without any lives being lost?"

The king of Daitan still looked to be half in doubt. However, Artpe had told him all the information he needed to know. It wasn't up to him to convince the king.

He didn't give a reply as he shot into the air. He was moving at such a fast speed that no one would have suspected that he was using a Float spell! It was a miracle created by pouring in an enormous amount of Mana into the spell!

“It’s him! That magician is revolting against Aedia!”

Since Artpe was flying high in the air, he was highly visible. Several magicians yelled out towards him.

Artpe had never joined Aedia, yet they were saying he was revolting against them? They were full of hot air. Did they think all magicians in the world originated from Aedia? He sneered at the arrogant and narrow-minded magicians as he increased his speed.

“You dare to bare your teeth on your benefactors. You stupid... Punish him!”

“Show them the power of Aedia!”

Countless spells surged into the sky of the capital. The most common spells seen was the Magic Missle, Fireball and Ice Spear. Then there were the more uncommon AOE magic coming towards Artpe.

Each Mana had its own color and texture, so the banquet of spells surging into the air looked like a firework show. However, each spell contained enough power to easily kill a person. If one underestimated the power of these spells, it was a mistake one would never make again in this life.

‘They know that all the magicians they sent towards me had been wiped out, yet they are attacking me in such a simplistic manner... I guess it is in the nature of magicians to act this way.’

Artpe was high in the sky, and spells were flooding towards him. The sight made him remember an incident from his past life. It wasn’t something that he had experience, but it was something he had witnessed.

‘At the time, Regina had been with them. When she found out of the truth, she became enraged and she sided with the hero. However, Aedia foolishly continued to believe until the end that they would be able to control her. They had been extremely foolish...’

As the weakest amongst the Four Heavenly Kings, Artpe was tasked to keep surveillance over the hero’s party. When he saw the sight of a girl regain her freedom, he clenched his fists as he cheered for her. He cheered for her even though he wasn’t in a position to do so. After the Absolute Control had been used against him, he had

been tormented for a long time. When he looked back on it, it was a fond memory... No, it wasn't a good memory at all.

"Let us engrave the laws of the magic kingdom onto his soul!"

"It isn't enough. I want everyone to pour out more spells!"

It seemed they were dissatisfied with the sight of Artpe floating in the air in a free and easy manner. Artpe hadn't asked for it, but the magicians sent additional spells towards him. They were recklessly consuming their Mana. It seemed some had consumed potions ahead of the battle, and there were those that were currently consuming potions. It was a sight to behold.

"You all haven't noticed that just pouring out your spells towards me is ineffective. You lost the moment you failed to realized this fact."

No, they might have lost from the moment they thought they could imprison Regina indefinitely. This had been true in the past life. They were brought down completely, because they had been deluding themselves.

"Eh-eet."

Artpe lightly swung his hand. The several hundred Mana Strings split into couple thousand Mana Strings. Each strand of Mana String nullified a spell, and Artpe was able to charge forward without losing momentum.

He didn't feel nervous at all, since he could easily block the attacks. The spells were only a minor annoyance to him. Any magic spell that could be used by the magicians of Aedia didn't amount to much.

'There's only three magicians that are over level 200. I'm sure many of the higher level magicians are dispatched to Tiata and the Forest of Eternity. They are lacking in terms of the number of powerful magicians they possess.'

This was why the magic kingdom, which had been touted to be the strongest on this continent, was in such a predicament. This was also the reason why the hero was the only hope for humanity. Aedia didn't possess much power, yet they became full of themselves. It was so pathetic that it made him want to shed a tear.

"Still, I shouldn't repeat what happened in the past."

In the middle of the sky, Artpe kept erasing the countless spells that were being thrown at him. As he did so, he slowly closed his eyes, and he started gathering all his Mana that wasn't being used by the Mana Strings.

"You are an organ that excretes the foul desire."

Artpe started chanting the only Great Magic he could use.

"You have accepted the filth of humans. You are a mystery of nature locked up away in misery."

He had already set his target. As he blocked all the magic spells, he reached the center of the capital where there was a raised structure.

"Reveal your fermented anger. Put the humans in their place."

Magic circle?

It was surprising. Artpe hadn't made any prior preparations, yet the magic circle was present. The magic circle encompassed the entirety of this region. If one wanted to find such magic circles, one could probably find it in all the cities within Aedia.

This was obvious, but Artpe hadn't installed it here. They had done it themselves.

"I will allow it, so go find your freedom. Rampage to your heart's content."

A purple magic item started to rise out from his bosom. It was the Demite, which he had finished refining. It possessed a will of its own, and the Demite acted to support Artpe in the chanting of his spell. It endlessly amplified the magical energy.

"He's casting a spell! He's using a Great Magic through a magic circle!"

"You idiot! We would have known if he created a magic circle here!"

"Destroy it! We have to destroy the magic circle now!"

"B... but this magic circle is... Oh my god."

Yes, they wouldn't be able to destroy it.

This magic circle was a symbol that represented the prosperity of the magic kingdom of Aedia.

A magic circle wasn't made purely out of Mana. Other material was needed to make what was considered to be greatest technique of this century.

A complete magic circle could created and maintain a spell.

The magic circle was a reminder to humanity and even the Demon race that magic was boundless in its use!

“That is why I want you to cover them equally.”

In the end, Artpe hadn't been interrupted while he completed his magic spell. However, there wasn't a smile of relief on his face. He had a resigned expression on his face.

“Flow backward.”

All of Artpe's Mana was sucked into the Demite. In an instant, it spread across the raised structures in the region. It spread 'below' to permeate into the buried magic circle.

Arpte's expression seemed to question whether he should be doing this or not.

He finished his spell.

“God Flush.”

...the sewer system that was installed across the entirety of the capital exploded all at once.

Chapter 95

Forest of Eternity (3)

“Ggoo-ahhhhhhhh!”

“Kyahhhhhk!”

“Eek! So dirty! Ooh-ahhhhhhhh!”

A miserable scream came out of every human that lived within the capital. As if it was trying to time itself with their screams, the sewer line started exploding all over the place. All kinds of filth surged forward along the artificial Flush magic circle, and the sewer lines.

“What the hell is this! What’s going on!”

“H... how...!”

Of course, the magician couldn’t avoid being baptized by the filth. In fact, it seemed the bigger explosions occurred near the magicians. The filth was caked on them like makeup. The magicians would have been able to block the filth with their barrier spells if there had been a moderate amount of fecal matter falling towards them. However, the entire sewer system had exploded, so the barrier spell was ineffective in blocking the downpour!

“Eeeeeeeeeeee!”

“How dare you do this! Unforgivable! I won’t forgive you!”

It didn’t matter if one was a magician over level 200 or a civilian that had remained at level one. They were equally coated in filth. Even worse was the fact that the God Flush was still progressing in real time. The water mixed with urine and fecal matter formed a vortex as it destroyed buildings, and it flung the filth all over the streets.

It was filthy.

It was really filthy.

"You guys shouldn't have made a magic circle here. Since you've made one, you should have secured it better."

Of course, he was able to see the formation of the magic circle, so he was able to control it in an instant. Aside from Artpe, no one was capable of making such a grand spectacle. However, that wasn't his problem.

"All right, then... [Hmm hmm!]"

Artpe didn't cause any casualties. He just caused damage to the heart of the people, and he selectively destroyed the buildings within the capital. As the God Flush continued its rampage, Artpe activated another spell.

[Can you all hear my words? I'm a magician hired by Daitan. I was hired as a mercenary.]

"T... that bastard!"

"I'll kill him!"

It was a spell that amplified his voice in all directions. It was the Loudspeaker spell. Moreover, it was a high rank Loudspeaker spell. His voice was able reach the entire capital!

Somehow, Mycenae was able to procure high ranking miscellaneous spells, yet she was slow in acquiring battle magic. Artpe let out a sigh inside as he continued to speak.

[The spell I just used is called God Flush. I was able to use the Flush magic circle you have installed below your city. It allowed me to use my spell over a vast distance. Thank you.]

Aedia was proud of its sewer system. When they heard Artpe's words, it made the magicians uniformly explode from frustration. As a former Four Heavenly King, he knew the exact timing and words needed to provoke the maximum amount of anger in his enemies. His proficiency in this skill was extraordinary!

[I'm not sure if you know this, but there are two ways to activate a Flush spell. The first way is to flush everything down. The second way is to wrench the flow of water

[to create a counter current. I'm using the second method right now.]

Artpe leisurely drank a Mana Potion, and he gave an explanation on the spell he was using. This act inflicted additional mental damage to the magicians.

The magicians weren't in a position to worry about the knights that were about to invade the capital. Each magician had come running to disrupt the flow of Mana being used by Artpe. They were also using barrier spells and purification spells in an attempt to counter what he was doing. However, magic was a fight determined by skill! Artpe used to be the weakest amongst the Four Heavenly Kings, but he was reborn as a hero. There was no one in Aedia that was able to stop Artpe's magical activities!

[It is useless. Unless you are able to dig out the entirety of your sewer system, you won't be able to stop this. You should just accept it. You can shower yourself with poop.]

"God Flush! You dare to put the title of a god in front of a Flush spell? I've never heard of this! I bet he's a black magician!"

In the end, they started to denounce him as being a black magician. If they were a bit further along in their magical studies, they should have known that God Flush was an extension of Flush. If one followed their logic, the magicians that created the sewer system using the Flush spell were also black magicians. It was ridiculous.

"Dirty... So dirty!"

"Damn it! How can a magician that reached such a lofty level use such a dirty tactic!"

The streets were dirty, but the situation was more dire within buildings that possessed plumbing. This was why everyone had exited their residence, and everyone's gaze was planted on Artpe.

[I love peace. That is why I limited the spell to the sewer system. However, it isn't as if Aedia only has the sewer system. Isn't that right?]'

The sewers were used by humans to send down dirty water. On the other hand, the water supply system purified the water, and it provided the humans with clean water.

Aedia had been fastidious in separating the sewer lines and the water supply lines. They were successful in creating the most hygienic nation in this world.

Of course, it was impossible not to damage the water supply system even if Artpe's control over his spell was impeccable. However, the architects of the sewer system had been thorough in confining the sewer lines. This was why the damage to the water supply line was limited.

[Let me put it this way...]

When Artpe raised his hand, the vortex of filth that had formed in the center of the capital started to threaten the people. Artpe's voice reached the entirety of the capital, so everyone was listening to his words. Unfortunately, they could guess where this was heading even without listening to his following words.

[If I want to do it, I can do it in an instant... I can blow up your water supply system too.]

“Devil! He’s the devil!”

“You are human, so how can you do something so cruel!”

The people were horror-struck. If the water supply system broke open, the filth dirtying their body would be washed away. It would feel great in the short term. On the other hand, there would be no separation between the sewage system and the water supply system. They would become the world’s dirtiest city of death...

No, they would be reborn as a manure pail.

“T... the war isn’t the problem right now... Everything is ruined!”

“This city holds the history of Aedia. How can you ruin it like this...!”

“Speak! Let’s resolve this through words!”

The magicians belatedly realized that they couldn’t stop Artpe from using his magic. This was why some magicians used their own Loudspeaker spell to plead with Artpe. However, if everything could be solved with words, there would be no war in this world.

[We only have one request.]

Artpe declared in a stern voice.

[We want a full surrender. Also, I've already killed the Duke of Tiata. I'm sure you are waiting for Tiata to stab us in the back. You shouldn't hold your breath.]

"T... Tiata...!? Tiata should be allies with Daitan..."

"Did he get caught... huht!"

Most of Aedia's magicians tilted their head in confusion. However, a very small number of them were taken aback by the news. Artpe surmised these were the select few that knew about the secret contract between Aedia and Tiata. Artpe engraved faces into his memory.

[From the moment your king declares his surrender, the spell will be stopped. I'll give you exactly five minutes.]

Of course, he didn't plan on being idle in the five minutes. Artpe continuously drank Mana Potions, and he kept pouring his Mana into the Demite. It further caused the filthy water to flow backwards.

He didn't mess with anything underground. If he saw a building that looked pretty big, he dyed it with filth! For the most part, he had avoided the residential areas, but the stores and magic towers were all broken and dirty now.

The spell was simultaneously occurring all over the vast city. It was proof that Artpe's ability to control his magic was immense! Of course, the outcry from the people grew louder as the destruction continued.

"S... surrender! We surrender!"

"Please spare my store! My wares will become useless! Please!"

"You guys are the ones that attacked us when we were just living our lives. Now you come to our capital to inflict violence on us... I'll put a curse on Daitan!"

"Shit. They didn't even give us the opportunity to conduct a proper battle!"

"However... We lost. We can't win against him!"

"Koo-hoohk. We'll have to become a vassal state!"

These were blatherings from those that didn't have any authority, so their words fell on deaf ears. Artpe just kept his gaze fixed on the palace with a smirk on his face. He waited for a response.

Finally, the response he had been waiting for had arrived.

"...not there."

"He isn't there... The king isn't in the palace!"

"How can that be! He was there only couple hours ago...!"

"...he ran away."

"The king abandoned his country! He ran away!"

The king had vacated the capital. The king had run away after the gathered magicians had failed in its defense of the capital. The fact that he had run away hadn't been unexpected.

Of course, Artpe had predicted this would happen. If the king was a run of the mill magician, it would have been a different story. However, the king had reached the top of the magic kingdom, so of course, he would be able to recognize the amount of power within Artpe.

The king probably became astonished when Artpe used the God Flash, and at that point, the king would have surmised that the Duke of Tiata was already dead. He decided to enact his plan.

'The Duke of Tiata had an emergency escape Artifact, and the item originated from Aedia. Of course, the king of Aedia would have the means to escape from this place. He probably used an Artifact or a Gate.'

The king probably would have fought if his opponent was decent. However, Artpe was well beyond being decent. This was why the king made his calculations, and he decided to run away.

Where did he go?

There was only one place he could go. He probably ran away to Tiata. This also meant

that there was a much higher chance that he'll run across Regina.

At that point, even Artpe couldn't guarantee how things would turn out.

"The road will be split into two directions... it'll either be the less annoying direction or the more annoying direction."

Of course, he couldn't choose how events will turn out, because he wanted it to go a certain way. Still, he hoped that events would head towards the less annoying route if possible. He didn't wish this for himself. It was for Regina.

[It seems the king ran away... So who has the next highest rank?]

Of course, they weren't present either. It was as if the high ranking members of the kingdom had made a pact. They had already run away to Tiata with the king. Everyone that possessed authority over Regina was probably in this group.

"We surrender!"

"We don't have the power to go against you... Shit!"

"What can we do when even the king has run away? From the founding of Aedia, we served the one that possessed the strongest magical energy. We accept you as our king!"

[King? Fuck that. You guys just yielded to those that had power. Your new king will be the king of Daitan.]

"You... You are an asshole to the end!"

Even if Artpe was on Daitan's side, he was only a mercenary. It would be absurd to put him on throne. Artpe snorted as he cancelled his spell. Then he made the declaration once again.

[All right. I want you to seal your Mana, and I want you to get on your knees. The knights should disarm themselves, and the good citizens of Aedia will get into the most humiliating posture. You will all declare your intent to surrender. The new king of Aedia is coming here right now.]

When the magicians, knights and soldiers were completely neutralized, Artpe shot a

flare into the air. The capital of Aedia had been conquered, but the king of Daitan hadn't wanted to enter the city for a while. In the end, he clicked his tongue, and he led his group into the capital.

"The magician was flawless in bringing down the capital! After we take over the palace, let us declare our victory!... follow me!"

"Please be careful of the road, your majesty."

"Ooh-eek. It's shit!"

"I don't like it here..."

How could a victory be so bitter and dirty like this! The king of Daitan ordered his knights to bind every magician. The magicians were strung along behind them, and they couldn't hide their rotten expression. They had never experienced a victory that was this hard to accept. It was their first.

"Aedia was brought to its knee like this..."

"I can't believe it. The magic that brought prosperity to our magic kingdom betrayed us..."

From this moment on, a new history would be written! After being reincarnated, Artpe properly overturned the scheduled history of his past.

"I'm sorry your first debut had to be here."

He retrieved the active Demite floating in the air, and he whispered his words to the Demite. As if it was reacting to Artpe's words, the Demite vibrated as it flashed its purple light twice.

It seemed the Demite wanted to give him a message, yet he had no idea what it was trying to say. It would have been great if Regina was here to translate for him.

[...nyaa?]

At that moment, Roa woke up from within his pocket, and there was a thrill in her voice.

"Huh? What's wrong? You were sleeping so well up until now."

Artpe had been about to ask Roa if she could converse with the Demite. Before he could do that, she jumped into the air as her eyes flashed.

[Nyaa nyaa nyaa nyaa-ahhhhhh!]

"There's a thick scent of black magic here? What the hell are you saying all of a sudden... Black magic?"

Roa turned into a thick fog as she went straight towards the palace. Artpe's expression hardened as he followed after her.

The true nature of what had happened in his past life was coming into focus.

Chapter 96

Forest of Eternity (4)

Originally, he had planned on meeting up with Daitan's forces. He would have strutted around at the head of the Daitan's army, and he would have used his magic to make their procession look awe-inspiring. However, things had turned out like this, so he didn't have the free time to clean up all the poop.

"Wait a moment, Roa! Is it perhaps the Demonification curse again?"

[Nyaaaa-ahhhh!]

Roa was already worked up, so Artpe's words weren't reaching her. He clicked his tongue as he quickly descended after Roa. When he did, he felt the trace of a curse. He could feel it deep within the palace. Fortunately, it wasn't a Demonification curse. It was simply an Emotion Amplification type curse.

'... it's an Emotion Amplification type curse?'

It was fortunate that this incident had no ties to the Demon race. However, a thought suddenly crossed his mind. Maybe, he might face something more unpleasant.

[Nyaa! Nyaa-ah-ah!]

Roa had arrived at the palace ahead of Artpe. She sped through the palace, which was covered with filth. She quickly headed towards the hidden location.

It wasn't just the filth. The sewer lines had exploded, but the various magical traps and locks remained intact! However, Roa was in her magical fog form, so she was capable of passing through even a solid wall. She easily passed through all obstacles. Artpe followed after her as he cleared the overturned palace.

"It is really hidden quite well."

The trace of the curse was hidden in a deep location. No one would have noticed it except for Artpe and Roa. Artpe possessed the Read All Creation ability, and Roa was

the Greed Beast, who ruled over all negative energy.

It was understandable as to why it was hidden. Not all magicians within the palace agreed with the king, and the deciding factor probably came down to the king's desire to hide it from Regina.

"We're here."

[Nyaa! Nyaa nyaa nyaa!]

It was a room within the palace where the king and a select few servants visited. Within this space, there was a secret storage room built within it. One needed to input several codes to be able to enter into the secret storage room. Roa was able to bypass everything except the last fail safe device. It deflected everything except for a certain type of Mana. Her progress had been stopped.

[Nyaa-ahhhhhh.]

"You only cling to me in this kinds of situation."

[Nyaa nyaa-ah.]

Artpe discovered Roa struggling against an old door. She couldn't bypass it. When she discovered Artpe, she returned to her cat form. She jumped into his arms, and she started badgering him. He looked down at her as he let out a hollow laughter.

"I also have to enter it, so... All right. I'll do it."

When Artpe opened his hand, several Mana Strings started to feel around the door. He had already used his Read All Creation ability to acquire the complete structure of the trap.

There was an impregnable lock that could only be opened by injecting the Mana of its owner. However, Arpte was able to disrupt and modify Mana. He had slowly learned how to do it by going through the hero's Dungeon created by his sunbae. He was able to tamper with the security spell. He was able to temporarily change the owner of the magic!

"Well, if this doesn't work, I'll just inject a massive amount of Mana. The lock won't be able to endure it. I'll overwhelm it in an instant. You should pay attention to this

method for your own use.”

[Nyaa nyaa nyaa-ah.]

The door opened. Artpe took hold of Roa, who was about to rush forward immediately.

If the space outside the room smelled like filth, the inside of the room smelled metallic from the blood.

“This is...”

Artpe’s expression became distorted. He was unable to speak for awhile. He could only bite his lips as he surveyed the room.

In his previous life, the Demon King’s army hadn’t interfered with the war between Aedia and the Elves. The two sides were on a path to mutual destruction, so the Demon King’s army didn’t go through the trouble of changing the course of events.

This was why Arpte only had a basic knowledge of what had happened here even though he had been in charge of gathering information for the Demon King’s army. He had only known about the result. He had no idea which person did what, and he had no idea how things had progressed here.

That’s why...

[Nyaa-ah.]

“I guess so.”

Tiata and Aedia had been trying to devour the Forest of Eternity. The evidence of what they had done to achieve this goal was left intact in this room. There were research books, reagents for curses and Artifacts... then there was the evidence of experimentation on living beings.

“They really are rotten to the core. They are trying hard in making me not have a guilty conscience. It is almost admirable.”

Artpe took out a large sheet from his Dimensional Pouch, and he placed it over the corpses of Elves that were left neglected in the corner of the room. Then he gently soothed Roa, who was trying to immediately eat the curse.

“No one is going to steal it from you, so please be patient... things have turned more unpleasant, but at the same time, it became easier.”

This room was a magical room that exposed the true nature of Aedia’s king. The king had to make an abrupt exit, so he hadn’t been able to get rid of all the evidences. Any magician that caught sight of this room would realize what Aedia’s braintrust had been doing up until now.

If the magicians had a normal upbringing and a minimal amount of conscience, Artpe would be able to easily bring them to his side. He just had to show them this room.

“I guess I’ll have to clean this up first.”

First, Artpe put a barrier type spell over the secret room. After preserving the state of the room, he used a large-scale Cleaning spell. In a flash, a portion of the castle became clean. He got a kick out of it.

“At the very least, I should clean up the palace before my party arrives.”

[Nyaa nyaa-ah.]

“You are going to help too, you dork.”

[Nyaa!]

After two hours, all the magicians and the seasoned knights of Aedia were bound. They were brought to the palace by the king of Daitan. The only place that was clean was the route taken by them, so all the civilians had taken refuge on the road. It was a very humorous sight.

“Artpe!”

“Oppa!”

“All right. Let’s get you washed. Cleaning.”

“Ooh-gyahk.”

They had been away from Artpe for a short time, yet they tried to pounce on him as they wiggled their non-existing tails. Before Maetel and Sienna could reach him, he

rinsed them down with the Cleaning spell. Afterwards, they were allowed to hug him. The king of Daitan had a tragic expression on his face as he glared at Artpe.

"Magician. You really didn't lie to us. You used a Great Magic spell to neutralize our enemies, and you brought the capital to its knees. However, you also hid a very important fact from us. The smell of shit is permeating from my entire body! Also, do you expect me to repair the sewer lines? How long do you think it will take me to clean all of this?! At this point, the capital is paralyzed! Paralyzed! How are we going to put everything back in order!"

"Stop being so sensitive."

Artpe had randomly fired his magic to clean the palace. In turn, his Cleaning spell had leveled up steeply. He once again activated his Cleaning spell to wash the body of the king, and everyone else present. Then the Cleaning spell started to expand. In a flash, the Cleaning spell covered several thousand to tens of thousands of people. It was merely a Cleaning spell, but it was awe-inspiring.

"As expected, you are an incredible magician. You were able to get rid of all the stain and stench... I won't have to take a bath."

"He is an Archmage, so why are all his spells..."

"Still, we have to accept it. He is... He is better than the 'former' king, who ran scared from the magic he displayed. He is more suitable to be the ruler of Aedia."

One of the magicians spoke up. Surprisingly, all the magicians nodded their heads. It made one realize in an instant that the word, 'magic', held a strong grip over the minds of the people of Aedia. The king of Daitan had been watching all of this, and he also picked up on the mood.

In truth, Artpe had participated in the war as Daitan's wartime mercenary, but his achievements had been to overwhelming!

It was an understatement to say that it was overwhelming. The only thing Daitan had to do was arrest the soldiers, who had voluntarily given up their weapons. That was all they had to do to reach the palace. They had gone through less effort than a beggar finding a dusty bread on the ground.

"You... Are you perhaps thinking about putting yourself on the throne?"

'If you planned on doing that, why didn't you come here by yourself?'

The king of Daitan glared at Artpe with an aggrieved expression on his face. Artpe let out a short sigh as he shook his head from side to side.

"I don't care if the title contains Demon in front of the king or if it is a regular king. It is all annoying. You can have it all."

"I really respect the fact that you can make such an assertion so decisively, but..."

"All right. Since everyone is gathered here, I'll make the declaration."

Artpe was receiving gazes that contained fright, trepidation, annoyance and awe. He made a firm declaration to the magicians and knights.

"I don't care if you serve the king of Daitan as lord or not. However, you shouldn't take too long to decide. I'll become annoyed, and you'll become annoyed. Do you understand?"

"You... What is your purpose in coming here?"

He was a level 217 magician, and he held the title of marquis. The middle-aged man asked Artpe a question.

"You possess great power, so why are you insisting on being a tool of Daitan? The power you possess aren't beholden to anyone, so why did you inject yourself into a fight between nations? I might be overstepping my bounds, but if I had your level of power, I would wage a war that would unite this continent."

"That is a very good question."

A broad smile appeared on Artpe's face as he spoke. He turned around as he pointed down the clean corridor of the palace.

"I was about to show you guys that reason."

Tens of thousands of people entered the palace at the same time. An overwhelming number of people bound by rope were being convoked in. It was a truly ironic sight.

"My god. The castle is completely restored."

“Is it a Restoration spell!? You used such a rare spell over such a large space? Truly ridiculous!”

“No, it is just a very high level Cleaning spell.”

The high level and matured Cleaning spell did more than just cleanse the dirtiness. It could make its target as clean as possible. On top of that, it had the ability to move items, and it could do restoration work!

It had taken Artpe 20 minutes to accomplish this task, and the palace was restored to a pristine condition. It was hard to believe that the palace had suffered under the countercurrent of the God Flush. Even if Artpe became jobless after defeating the Demon King, he could make his living as a cleaner! That’s how great his cleaning ability was!

“Why is there the stench of blood in this clean palace?”

“...is this what you wanted to show us? Did our king commit suicide instead of running away?”

“It would have been cute if he had killed himself.”

Artpe guided the group deep into the palace. The magicians realized that each hallway they passed was teeming with incredible magical traps. They let out murmurs of appreciation when they realized that Artpe had disarmed them all.

“We are well aware of the fact that the palace’s defensive magic was passed down through the generations, and they are all high level spells. I never expected those defensive magics to be easily neutralized like this.”

“Even if the Demon king invaded us, we assumed he would never be able to breach the palace...”

“A... are you perhaps the Demon King!?”

They really were spouting bunch of nonsense. Artpe let out a sigh as he directed their gazes. From within the room, he could hear Roa’s faint cry. She wanted him to come quickly.

“Oh my god. This is where the king resides...”

“Is this the energy of a curse!?”

The magicians that were sensitive to Mana and those that were quick on the uptake started to pick up on traces of the curse. The magicians could sense it from a long distance away, but it was impossible for the knights. Tens of thousands of people could come into the palace, but it was a tight fit. This was why Artpe started creating a new space.

“The palace is falling!”

“Ooh-ahhhhhhhhhhk!”

He would do it by force!

“You brute!”

“This is something everyone should see.”

Artpe broke apart the palace, and he grinded the falling fragments. He used several hundred Mana Strings to demolish and clean up the building. It wasn't hard at all!

“What is waiting for us...”

“...I think I have some idea. It doesn't feel good. This feeling...”

They knew that their king wasn't a squeaky clean figure. Despite this knowledge, the faces of the magicians started to harden. A very small number of magicas had participated in this endeavor with the king. They were going through great pains in trying to keep a low profile.

Unfortunately for them, Artpe's Read All Creation ability could see the skills each of them possessed. On top of that, he could use the faint trace of Mana left behind in the king's residence to determine guilt or innocence. Of course, Arpte was ready to bring them all of them down with just a glance.

Finally...

“We are here.”

[Nyaa?]

Roa was tired of waiting, so she grumbled as she jumped into Artpe's arms. Artpe had opened up the nearby walls, so he was able to show them the secret space kept by the king. The magicians closest to Artpe were at a loss for words when they saw what was inside the room.

"My god..."

"Why are you reacting that way? I think I know what is going on, so let's... Huht."

The unrest started to spread. Everyone in the front froze in place when they saw within the room. The people in the back pulled back the people frozen in the front, and a new group of people pushed to the front. They also froze in place. This process kept repeating itself until everyone saw what was within the room.

"Do you now see what Aedia and Tiata is doing within the Forest of Eternity?"

For a while, no one replied to Artpe's words. The people directly involved had a serious expression on their faces, but the bystanders felt like idiots. The unrest spread throughout the people gathered there.

"Magician."

The king of Daitan queried Artpe with a calm voice.

"I have a hunch as to where the king of Aedia had run away. Will you help me subdue him?"

His eyes were on the storage room dyed with blood. There were corpses of Elves within the room that were sullied by all kinds of curses and lust. There were ingredients that were used to make the curses, and a bookcase full of black magic tomes that dealt with Control type magic... there was also the half destroyed Warp Gate present.

Artpe spoke.

"Wait. I'm planning on gathering more participants."

In truth, he didn't want participants. He wanted an audience. However, Artpe declined to speak this out loud.

It would make the listening audiences feel bad.

Chapter 97

Forest of Eternity (5)

“The king of Aedia... Black magic...”

“This can't be happening. This can't be...”

“Oh my god. This is... It is Control magic. It is a black magic that forcefully suppresses the will of others!”

The magicians were frozen for a short amount of time. Then the magicians started to rotate into the room. Each magician wanted to see if their king had truly done this. Moreover, they started investigating to see if anyone else was connected to this endeavor.

“How can this be? I swore allegiance to a man using such an evil magic...!”

“We should preserve this site. We have been ignorant of what had been going on here, and that frustrates me... We cannot make any more mistakes. It will be recorded into our history!”

It was the same with the knights affiliated with Aedia.

They were from the magic kingdom, but in the end, they were knights. They had their own beliefs and code of honor. They also tried to find out why the former king had dabbled in black magic. They worked in conjunction with the magicians to find out why the king had performed such atrocities to the Elves.

They had felt helpless when they had to yield to a single magician. However, in the next moment, they had observed something that shouldn't be present in their kingdom. They felt their drive and motivation come back.

“We've finished analyzing the curse on the corpses of the Elves. This is... This is a curse that stimulates undesired feelings. Yes, I'm sure there was a recent report that said the conflict between Tiata and a different race was escalating near the Forest of Eternity. C... could it be...!”

"Did the king perhaps... How foolish!"

"I found stored missives that were exchanged between the king and the Duke of Tiata. There are also records of experiments where they used magic to coerce the Elves... Ah ah! Ah ah ah! What a horrific thing to do! They were brazen enough to practice the damned black magic in the heart of the magic kingdom of Aedia!"

That's right.

The king of Aedia had been researching for a way to dominate beings with intellect.

This probably all started when Regina was made.

When the magicians realized that they couldn't completely control Regina, the king of that era worked with the magicians to come up with a method that was better than the power of suggestion. They started researching a spell that would give them complete control over Regina. In the end, they came to a conclusion that magic couldn't coerce the mind of a person...

This was why they started to dabble in black magic.

Not all black magic were the same. It didn't matter what type of magic it was. Depending on how any magic was used, it could create a horrific result. On the other hand, black magic needed a price in exchange for its use. It required sacrifice of other beings. This was why it was called black magic, and it was widely recognized as something only the Demon race used.

It was the reason why black magic was strictly forbidden since the founding of the magic kingdom of Aedia. They acted as the custodian of black magic. It was also the reason why the kingdom had a large amount of information that dealt with black magic.

At first, they started researching for a way to coerce Regina with magic. As expected, their research started to slowly spread into other interests.

Once they succumbed to the temptation, there was no restraint holding them back.

This was why Aedia had worked with Tiata. They researched for a way to control the Elves.

'Since the Elves weren't human, they convinced themselves that it would be all right. However, would that be enough for them? No way.'

The research into magic that dominated the Elves were merely a ridiculous justification. How could the spell they were researching actually differentiate between other races?

They had created a red line that said everything would be fine if they didn't use it against humans. In truth, the experiment didn't discriminate between Elves, humans or Demites. It would be an absolute Control magic. In some ways, it was more evil than the Innate ability of the Demon King.

In the case of the Demon King, he either controlled everyone, or he destroyed anyone that he couldn't control. He was a monster, yet he hadn't shown interest in the Control magic being researched by the humans.

The reason was quite simple. The Demon King already possessed an Innate ability called the Absolute Control. He also came to the conclusion that it was impossible to dominate another being with the power of magic. It had to be an Innate Ability.

This was the actual truth. In his past life, Aedia's spell resulted in truly horrendous side effects. This was why the Elves went out on an all out war against the humans. By the end of the war, the Elves were nearly wiped out.

The Forest went up in flames, and no new Elves appeared afterwards. Several nation became ruined in this war, and that was when the Demon King's army began fighting the hero's party in earnest.

The hero had been in a lot of pain, and she had cried...

For the first time, Artpe realized what emotions the hero had been feeling at the time.

...no, the events of his past life wasn't important now.

Artpe was standing in this spot, because he didn't want a repeat of that event.

"This magic is a failure. You guys can tell, right?"

"Our magic isn't trained to the extreme like yours. We were barely able to find out that the dead Elves were killed by the side effects of the curse."

"The curse that stimulates emotions is merely a means to an end. It is easier to use the Control magic when the subject's structure of thought is simplified."

"This was why they acquired a sample of Elves to test the curse... Oh my god. This is a calamity!"

It seemed the magicians were finished making their judgements. Artpe clapped his hands once. It stopped the knights and magicians in their tracks. They had been immersed in examining the site. It was time for him to explain the situation.,

"I was given a request by an Elf to investigate this matter. I went through a lot of hardship to find this out... It wasn't just the king. I also found out that most of Aedia's leadership class were involved in this. That is why I decided to work with the king of Daitan. I decided to cleanse Aedia. That was my plan, and that is why we are all here."

Of course, many objected to the way he wanted to cleanse Aedia. Thankfully, everyone's attention was focused elsewhere.

"Most of our leaders were involved? Wait a moment..."

There were people here that were considered to be the leaders amongst the magicians, knights and nobles. Everyone's gazes head towards them. Artpe grinned.

"At my skill level, I'm able to investigate Mana and Records that are left behind. I just need some time to... There we go."

"Koo-ahhhhk!"

"I... it wasn't me! No... Kahk!"

When he threw the bait, the idiots bit immediately! Artpe used the Mana Strings he had already laid out beforehand. Some tried to run away in the opposite direction, and some attacked Artpe. There were those that were able somehow able to reactivate the damaged Warp Gate. They tried to jump through it. He killed them all.

His attack was close to the speed of lightning. Everyone knew Artpe was meeting out justice, yet they were frozen in place.

"My god. It is impossible to resist against him."

“I wonder if he really is the Demon King.”

“I’ve never seen or heard of this spell before. It is a thin thread of Mana, and it contains incredible amounts of power...”

“My magic isn’t what is important right now.”

Artpe dusted his hands off as he burned the corpses of the traitors. Then he raised a hand. A Demite was floating above his hand, and it was letting out fire.

Surprisingly, he was using the basic fire spell. However, he was using an overwhelming amount of Mana, and he was Dual Casting. He was able to generate a disproportionately large amount of power using the fire spell.

“Well, I killed all of the ones that came forward on their own... It’s time for me to kill the hidden ones.”

“There are still more left-kahk!”

A noble was being shameless by acting as if he wasn’t part of the leadership group. His head was the first to burn. He was just the start. Fire erupted from between the tens of thousand elite troops.

The flashy and domineery festival of fire lasted less than 3 minutes. Currently, the number of people killed had reached 150.

“Evidence! We need evidence! You might have killed innocent people!?”

“I can tell at a glance. The people I just killed right now had traces of black magic on them. Those that escaped my notice can live quietly in hiding, or it might be easier on you if you just take your own lives.”

God Flush was a Great magic, but it had materialized through the magic circle. This meant that Artpe possessed an incredible amount of magical energy, and he was able to read and use the magic circle.

However, Artpe had just shown an appallingly amount of control and finesse over his Mana. He was able to create enormous amount of power using a minimal amount of Mana. It was the way in which one was able to use magic efficiently.

Normally, magicians devoted themselves to a specialized field. This wasn't the case with Artpe. Even if one considered his high level, he made no sense.

"This... I understand."

At that moment, one of the magician let out a sigh as he yelled out.

"You have a variety of abilities that seems to have have no boundaries. You are young, yet you have overwhelming magical energy and level. You are close enough to them that you receive a Quest from the Elves... Are you this generation's hero?"

Every human stopped breathing. However, the silence didn't last long.

"...what?"

"This tyrant is a hero?"

"That makes no sense. I've heard heroes were born within the Diaz Kingdom, but that was only couple years ago... No, this all fits."

Artpe was 15 years old, but he had matured much faster. However, he wasn't able to eliminate all childlike features. This was the same for Maetel, who stuck close to Artpe.

They had traveled through many regions, yet it was odd that no one had recognized the identity of Artpe and Maetel.

"I've heard there are two heroes this time around. It means one of the two ladies is also a hero. Both of you are so strong that I have no idea which one of you is the hero..."

"He's a hero. That is why he had such a strong reaction to the black magic!"

"The actions of this hero is a little bit too dirty...]"

The opinions between the magicians started to diverge. Artpe quietly asked his question.

"Will you believe me if I said I'm not the hero?"

"We believe that you are the hero."

Artpe smacked his lips. These damn magicians were prejudiced and obstinate, but they were quick on the uptake when it came to this.

Maybe, this was also why they were much quicker in identifying Artpe as a hero. A hero held a special status amongst humans. Even if a hero had superior powers, the humans didn't become jealous or envious of the hero. They just accepted a hero's power as a given.

It also meant that the magicians hadn't wanted to admit that they were weak, so they decided to designate him as a hero...

Still, it was better than being called the Demon King. Artpe resigned himself as he acknowledged their words.

"Yes, it is a hero's quest. Does everything make sense now?"

"It does. However, I never expected Aedia to become an obstacle that blocks the progress of a hero... It is a truly bitter pill to swallow."

The faces of the magicians either held dejection or resignation. Artpe also had a similar expression on his face.

"I'll continue on the basis that everyone has accepted my claim. The king had already assessed my power, and he had run away. The evidence is all here. He was short on time, so he couldn't destroy his research materials. He wasn't able to completely destroy his Warp Gate. I'll sum up the situation for you. The biggest culprit in bringing down Aedia was the king, and I have the means to go fuck him up."

Aedia was ruined by Artpe. He was solely responsible for it, but he was able to use the tragedy that had occurred in this room. He was successful in shifting all the blame to the king of Aedia! The knights were burning up from the sense of betrayal and their sense of justice. The magicians felt the same way.

However...

"Isn't the Gate partially destroyed?"

"Have you never done an Artifact Restoration Quest? Don't you know that the requirement needed to restore a partially destroyed item is completely different from a completely destroyed item?"

Artpe took out a portion of the Kraken's corpse from the Dimensional Pouch. He threw it towards the Warp Gate, and he Reinforced the Warp Gate. It really was that simple. In a flash, the Warp Gate regained its functionality, and it started to activate.

"Wait a moment. The specimen you just used..."

"I'm going to do it two more times."

Whenever he used his Reinforcement skill, he took out by-products from high level monster he had killed. They were all over level 200. He indiscriminately used them as minor ingredients! Thanks to the ingredients, Artpe was able to finish three Reinforcements. The Warp Gate was sturdier and larger than before.

Basically, the repair of the Warp Gate was no longer a problem. It would take a little bit of time, but if he wanted to, he could send everyone gathered here across the Warp Gate!

"...what the hell did he just do right now?"

"My head hurts. Are you sure he used magic?"

"Well, let's do this."

Artpe's smile deepened. His smile was truly dark.

"I'm putting together a punitive party for the former king of Aedia."

Of course, no one enthusiastically said 'yes' or 'no' when they were put on the spot.

Artpe led the tens of thousands of people into the Gate.

Chapter 98

Even if We Look Different from Each Other (1)

Artpe's party passed through the Gate to arrive in Tiata. When they arrived, the sound of an explosion in the distance assaulted their ears. In an instant, Artpe assessed where the spell had originated. He grinned when he found the source of the Mana.

"It's Regina. She's doing her part well."

"Regina is attacking the Elves!?"

As always, Maetel misunderstood his words in the oddest way. He flicked his fingers on her forehead. Then he turned to look at the Gate. A stream of humans were exiting the Gate, and he waited for them to get in line. The king of Daitan asked Artpe a question.

"What are we going to do now, magician?"

"First, we'll have to take care of the humans that are rushing towards us."

Artpe pointed his finger, and the king could see a large number of soldiers and knights rushing towards them!

When the king of Aedia and his party escaped through the Gate, they were able to move in stealth since their party was small. However, Artpe's party wasn't trying to be stealthy. They were moving people on a large scale. Of course, Tiata would notice!

"Maetel."

"...Artpe, why does your expression look as if you are trying to say, 'I choose you!'?"

Artpe's education had born fruit. Maetel's competence had improved a lot. Artpe felt pleased. He nodded his head as he yelled out his words.

"I choose you! I want you to break them as gently as possible!"

“You are too much!”

“In fact, I want you to face Tiata, while we go visit the Forest of Eternity. Ah. If possible, don’t kill them.”

“You sound indifferent! You are too much!”

The gist of the current situation was to shed as much blood of their ‘enemies’. In the end, a very few number of humans had manipulated Daitan, Aedia, Tiata and the Forest of Eternity. The rest of the humans were blameless in this matter.

Artpe wanted to get through this as smooth as possible. Such line of thinking had brought about the God Flush being used, so it was ironic that he was having such thoughts. He decided to ignore it.

If the trouble within the Forest of Eternity spread, there was a possibility Tiata would become involved. What if an absolute power drew away the gaze of Tiata... He would be able to stop Tiata’s involvement at the root. Moreover, if the Elves escape the Forest of Eternity, Maetel would be able to subdue them without doing too much damage!

“Your arguments are falling a bit short...”

“No, it isn’t like that.”

Artpe immediately gave his denial, but in truth, Maetel was correct. He was trying to leave her behind, because unsavory things were happening within the Forest of Eternity. He wanted to solve it without getting her involved.

This was a situation that he couldn’t end cleanly. It wasn’t something he could end without injuring someone. However, it wouldn’t be like his past life. Artpe had already taken several measures, so there wouldn’t be a tragedy like before... Still, Artpe didn’t want Maetel to get involved in what was going on within the Forest of Eternity.

“Please, Maetel. This is my wish.”

Artpe firmly took both hands of Maetel. He moved in close to look into her eyes as he made his request. She knew Artpe was trying to evade answering her question, yet she inevitably became fooled by him!

“Yes. Leave it to me!”

This was why he liked uncomplicated woman like her. Maetel unsheathed her bastard sword as she charged forward. Artpe had an expression of a bad boy as he turned around. The king of Daitan was dumbfounded as he replied.

“She is a powerful warrior, and I also heard that she is a hero. However... Will it be possible for her to stop the entire dukedom by herself?”

“Yes.”

“Hoo-ryahhhhhhhh!”

Right on cue, Maetel used her Bash skill to roughly impact on the ground. She destroyed the entire corridor where several thousand soldiers and knights were running across. They were all buried in one go. The king shut his mouth when he saw this. In certain aspects, the sight of Maetel was scarier than Artpe’s magic.

“I told her to minimize the casualties. It seems she is going to pull back only when they are on the verge of death.”

“Her power has already transcended the realm of humans...”

“Later on, the Demon King’s army will experience her power ad nauseum. It’ll be in your best interest to focus on the growing your elite troops.”

“Now that you mention it, you are a hero! I just realized that there is a possibility that the Demon King will make his appearance!”

The king was able to say such rude things as if it was nothing. Artpe glared at him then he turned around.

“Let’s head out.”

There were tens of thousands of knights, magicians and other audiences following him. Artpe blew a hole in the wall enclosing the palace. He led everyone out through the hole.

“How come destruction follows everywhere you pass through!”

“The Mana is overheating! Let’s hurry!”

The Forest of Eternity was pretty far away, but the distance was easily overcome by the humans in Artpe's party. They had the ability to do so. It was as Artpe had boasted. Maetel was able to block the advance of Tiata by herself. Artpe and his party quickly exited Tiata, and they arrived at the border of the Forest of Eternity.

At that point, the other's in the party had noticed it. They realized that there was a ominous energy permeating the forest. There sensed Mana being opposed by a curse and black magic. Everyone in the party grinded their teeths when they felt it.

"This is the energy we felt within the king's secret room."

"We might be too late!"

Not everyone came here with the thought of protecting the Elves. They just couldn't allow someone to break their biggest taboo of using black magic against a race capable of rational thought.

They were fully aware that such magic could be turned against humanity too.

"If you think this is too late, then we are couple months late. Don't worry about it."

Artpe increased the speed of his Float spell as he put his party at ease. It didn't matter if they were early or late. This was something that was supposed to happen, and it wasn't something that could be blocked easily.

However, there was one important point. Artpe held a trump card that could nullify everything that was done here.

[Nyaa, nyaa nyaa nyaa nyaa, nyaa nyaa-aht nyaa-ahhhh!]

"All right. I get it, so calm down... we have to wait a little bit. If we heal the wound before it gets infected, their sense of caution won't develop."

Roa was being unruly. She wanted to immediately eat all the energy permeating the forest. Artpe calmly soothed her as he spoke to her. There was another reason why he had kept Maetel away from here. He was afraid Maetel would discover his black heart.

"Isn't that called image management, oppa? You really treat her with a lot of love and care."

“You are already aware of it, so it can’t be helped.”

If he wanted to end this situation cleanly, he should have sent Roa with Regina to Tiata. However, Artpe hadn’t done that. If he solved everything at the get go, others wouldn’t be able to gain anything from this situation.

The people of Aedia and Regina had to see this for themselves. They had to come their own realization. They had to see the true nature of what they had done, and they had to find their own path forward.

“If we do this, we’ll have an easier time later on.”

“This is already a tiresome situation for you, oppa. Even if you push others forward, there will come a time when oppa will have to solve everything.”

“Be quiet, you dork.”

“Ooh-eeeeeee.”

Both of Artpe’s hands were mashed against Sienna’s cheeks, yet she was enjoying it. Somehow, he was able to have a little fun in this situation, but he started to hear whispers.

‘He has two women...’

‘He’s a hero, yet he’s fooling around with two girls...’

He stopped what he was doing.

“I feel a magical energy coming closer to us.”

“Is it perhaps the Mana of the Elves?”

It was the correct answer. The disturbance that was occurring at the middle of the Forest of Eternity had agitated the Elves. They were on the move. Currently, their bodies were being dominated by the Emotion Amplification curse. Of course, they would go crazy when they found tens of thousands of humans within their forest.

“We found them! They are humans!”

“Kyahh. They showed up before I could say anything.”

The voices of the Elves rang in the ears of Artpe’s party. The voices indicated that a battle would be imminent, and several dozen arrows appeared from between the trees. Of course, all of them were blocked by the Holy Barrier activated by Artpe.

Since his identity as a hero was exposed, there was no reason for him to hide his other skills. He didn’t hesitate as he used a spell that wasn’t associated with the Magician Class.

“Kook. There are several hundred Elves within the forest... Unfortunately, we can’t just surrender to them. Everyone get ready for battle...!”

“You don’t have to!”

He interrupted the king’s speech as he chanted out another spell. It was none other than a Fire spell...

“W... wait a moment...”

“Human, let’s talk!”

“Go!”

In a flash, the Fire spell had become as big as a full moon. In a flash, it left Artpe’s hand, and it detonated in a far away portion of the forest!

“Ooh-ahhhhhhhhk!”

“The forest... the forest is burning!”

“How much Mana does he have? It is just a simple Fire spell, yet he created such a terrible disaster! We won’t forgive you, human!”

It didn’t matter if the Elves wanted to kill Artpe or not. In a flash, several dozen trees started to burn, and the fire started to spread to other regions! The humans were taken aback. The Elves were so horrified that they had stopped attacking. At that moment, Artpe yelled out in a gallant voice.

“Do you want to fight us or do you want to extinguish that fire! If you choose to

extinguish the fire, we won't attack you!"

"Koohk! Wicked humans!"

"You are craven!"

Artpe had gone for the low blow by holding the forest hostage! They were witnessing a hero threaten the Elves, and it was effective!

"Koo-ooohk... You wait and see, human!"

"We won't forget this!"

"Ooh-ahhhk. The fire is spreading! Hurry up everyone!"

The most important thing to the Elves were the forest. It was where they lived. Their fighting spirits were amplified, and they were filled with the will to kill humans. However, the forest was burning in front of them. There was no way they would let the forest burn in front of them even if it meant letting the humans go!

"Wow. Look at them ebb away like a low tide. It seems they are well aware of the importance of the forest. As expected, the Elves received a fantastic upbringing."

"...where did you learn all these cheap tactics?"

The king of Daitan had been getting ready to fight the Elves. He sheathed his sword, and he asked the question with a despondent voice. Artpe didn't answer him. He just grinned as he stepped forward.

Afterwards, groups of Elves kept appearing at irregular intervals to stop the party of humans. However, Artpe create a new fire ball each time, and he set fire to a portion of the forest.

The Elves were horrified, and they ran off to put out the fire. Artpe's party was able to travel through the forest at high speeds. Those that were following Artpe had been prepared to get into a fight, and they looked liked idiots right now.

"Humans!"

"Eh-eet."

“Ggoo-ahhhhhhk!”

Artpe loaded a fireball on each hand, and he ran through the forest as he set it on fire. It was a truly brutal sight. He had already damaged 30% of the Forest of Eternity, but no human or Elf had been killed in the process. In some ways, it was truly a peaceful method.

“I don’t know why I’m having such bitter thoughts...”

“You guys think the process is important. You guys are under a delusion, because of this wrong mindset. From now on, you should try to fix that mindset... Ah.”

Artpe had been calculating the most effective way of chasing off the Elves that appeared from anywhere and at anytime. However, his feet suddenly came to a stop. The humans, who had been busy chasing after him, naturally came to a stop as if by magic. The two fireballs burning atop his palms disappeared as if they were a mirage

“We are here. This is the World Tree.”

“World Tree?”

When the king of Daitan gave his reply, the trees that were blocking their view was obliterated by a brilliant explosion magic. Artpe created winds using his magic, and he pushed aside the debris as he walked forward. The rest of his party found out what Artpe had been talking about.

“You bitch...! Do you plan on going against your master!”

“You aren’t my master.”

Several adult humans were fighting against a small girl. It was a cowardly sight.

Artpe’s party caught sight of the fierce magical battle, and...

“My god...”

“How can a tree grow so big? Even if it endured the passage of untold years, how can this be!”

“Ah ah ah. This is...”

The girl had her back against a truly giant...

From the surface of the ground, it was over 300 meters in height. A tree of ridiculous size was standing tall.

Chapter 99

Even if We Look Different from Each Other (2)

The World Tree was a sacred tree that was called the mother of all Elves. While the World Tree remained alive, the existence of Elves couldn't be ended. Moreover, their power remained undiminished unless the World Tree wilts away.

The World Tree accompanied the race of Elves from their birth to its demise. Basically, it was a god-like existence to the Elves.

That being was in front of the party.

"This is the first time I've seen it intact."

"Intact...?"

"I'm just saying this is the first time I've seen it."

When he saw the several hundred meter high World Tree, his heart relaxed a little bit. This was why he had let out an exclamation that contained information connected to his past life. Sienna picked up on it as she asked him a question. He quickly came up with an excuse. Of course, Sienna was also in awe of the World Tree, so she just took his excuse at face value.

Artpe wasn't the only one that felt impressed by the World Tree. Various humans were letting out words of admiration.

"I can see why the Elves are so hellbent in protecting it. I can feel incredible amounts of Mana throughout the World Tree... I wonder how many great Artifacts one would be able to make with the World Tree as an ingredient."

"That is the problem with the mindset of humans. This is why Elves are hostile against humans, you asshole."

"Koothk!"

Artpe didn't hesitate as he smacked the back of the king's head. The king wanted to come back by accusing Artpe of destroying more than 10% of the trees within the Forest of Eternity. However, he was weak. He had no choice but to take the beating. He was upset by it, and he vowed to raise his level more in the future.

"Koohk! Other humans!? Moreover, that bastard...!"

"...excessively fast."

Artpe's party had reached the World Tree. Of course, Regina, Aedia's king and his group had realized this fact. However, they were too busy attacking each other to divert their attention towards Artpe's party.

The king of Aedia was over level 240, and he was an Archmage. The high ranking nobles with him were of similar level. If not, they were only a bit short of the king's level and skill. They were all attacking Regina, yet the contest was even. It was a testament to Regina's skill.

"As expected of a group that had represented Aedia, their intentions are evil, but their strength is undeniable..."

"Who's the girl that is going neck and neck with them? The magical energy within her body is much deeper than the others!?"

"Huht. Reginna... Regina rebelled against the king!?"

The knights of Daitan didn't know about the existence of Regina. A good portion of the magicians didn't know about her either. Those that knew about her were surprised by what they saw.

Regina had never acted against Aedia, yet she was attacking the king and those that held authority over her!

"Oh. She's a golem that mutinied."

"...this isn't a mutiny"

She had picked up on Artpe's not so flattering words. Regina was busy fighting, yet she pouted as she responded to Artpe.

"There are no restrictions. Humans are all swindlers."

What was the order that had made her go against the king? The trace of the battle indicated that the battle had started deep within the forest, and it had reached the World Tree. At the very least, it seemed she had found out about the curse and the black magic prepared by Aedia within the forest.

It seemed she knew what the king planned on doing the Elves. Her aversion to the plan was the impetus for her to successfully push back against her orders.

'She's able to endure the collar choking around her neck, yet she couldn't stand others being victimized. In the end, that spurred her into action... Well, she was like that in the past life too. Still, she was way too late in realizing this fact in the past.'

In his previous life, the black magic had successfully been implemented, and it had closed in around the necks of Elves. Only then did she finally think about going against her masters. By the time she stood with the hero, too many had died to repair the situation. From that point on, Regina tried to rectify her actions by trying to fix reality. She sacrificed much in the process.

However, Artpe had encountered her at an earlier date in this life, and he was able to use various methods to marinate and season her. He had motivated her to stop everything before things could get out of hand.

Of course, even if she hadn't stopped them, he would have solved the problem somehow. Anyways, the best option to solve this situation remained viable. At this point, he patted himself on the back. He thought his ability to predict what would happen was a step superior to the Demon King.

On the other hand, the king of Aedia still believed that the situation could be reversed. He desperately tried to stall her thought process. He tried to shackle her again through the power of suggestion!

"A much bigger backlash will come to you soon! You are like this, because your thought circuitry is malfunctioning!"

"The restriction works in real time. I'm fine. I'm very angry right now!"

"Koohk...!? Block-aht!"

Of course, it would no longer work against her. When Regina spread both her hands, her magic resolved into a wind spell called the Dragon's Claw. The wind clawed at the king and his party. It was a strike that was filled with her rage and magical energy.

“Shit!”

“Koo-ahhhhhhhk!”

In a battle between magicians, great magics that required long incantations weren't ideal. If one had the magical energy, it was better to use a spell that materialized immediately. It was more effective to use one-off attack magic! The magicians, who were suffering under the attack, tried to activate their barrier magic. However, two of them were too slow in reacting. Their bodies were torn into pieces.

[Nyaa-ah. Nyaa-ahhhhhh. Nyaa nyaa nyaa nyaa nyaa-ahhhh!]

“Wait. Endure it for a little bit longer.”

“Oppa has a really bad personality. I like that about you!”

“I'm not sure who's beat you are dancing to... You should start getting ready, Sienna.”

“If its Purification, I'm confident in my abilities. Leave it to me...”

A magic battle of the century was occurring in front of the World Tree, and the battle agitated the ambient Mana within the forest. Currently, the Elves were completely taken over by the curse, so their base instinct was overriding their rationality. Even now Artpe could feel the Elves converging on the World Tree.

Thankfully, the Elves hadn't ventured out of the forest. If they did, it would have made Maetel's task more annoying.

“What do you want us to do, magician? If you occupy the girl with the horrific amount of magical energy, we can take care of the remnants of Aedia.”

“I'm sorry for dragging all of you guys here. In truth, I don't need you guys for anything. You guys can just sit back and eat some buttered corn on the cob.”

“B... buttered corn on the cob?”

"Don't you know that it is a specialty of Diaz? This is why I don't work with country bumpkins."

They were mere audiences that will record the dirty history of Aedia. They were here, so they would start looking in the mirror. The main characters for this stage was Regina, Artpe, Roa and the World Tree.

"Humans are here!"

"How dare you sully the holy World Tree... Humans!"

"The World Tree gave us an order to kill all of them!"

"Dark Elves? No, those that do not follow the World Tree's orders is supposed to become Dark Elves!"

It didn't take long for all the Elves to descend on the World Tree. The number of Elves kept increasing, and there were tens of thousands of them. Their levels were low, but they were in their forest. They were receiving the World Tree's Blessing. This was why their abilities doubled in power, and there were tens of thousand of them! Of course, the humans became nervous.

"M... magician. Is the buttered corn on the cob some kind of a secret code word? At this rate, things are going to get really dangerous Aren't you doing this, because you want to protect the Forest of Eternity!?"

"Don't be so nervous. They aren't in a situation where they'll be able to attack us. Do you really think those Elves look normal?"

"What?"

At Artpe's words, the king of Daitan obediently turned to look at the Elves, and he froze in place.

"...Dark Elves? No, they are falling at this very moment!"

The Elves were showing up from all sides. Almost half of the Elves possessed brown skin.

According to Elven tradition, the Dark Elves were fallen Elves. They became Dark Elves

if they broke a rule set by the World Tree. If all of them believed this... It meant that most of the Elves were currently going against the World Tree's will.

"No! My skin!"

"Please stop, elder! Your skin is turning brown!"

"W... why did the World Tree do this to me!"

The Elves had come to punish the humans, who had intruded into their territory. However, they were sent into a state of utter confusion.

How could this be?

They had responded to the World Tree's will, and they were fighting to protect the forest from the humans! So why were the Elves degenerating into becoming Dark Elves?!

"Oppa... I'm curious about something."

The humans were confused, and the Elves were confused.

In the midst of everything Sienna carefully asked Arpte a question.

"Did oppa intend for this to happen?"

When he heard her words, the corner of his mouth lifted. He smirked.

As expected, Sienna was smart unlike someone he knew. Instead of answering her question, he lightly threw a question towards Sienna.

"Sienna, do you know how the Dark Elves are born?"

"They are Elves being punished by the World Tree for breaking its rules... I guess that's not true since oppa is asking me that question."

"Yes."

Arpte explained it to her in a kind voice.

“Dark Elves are a form of an occupation. The World Tree chooses Elves with a certain disposition as a defensive response. The World Tree gives these Elves a Blessing.”

“Blessing...?”

Sienna asked him a question, because his words didn’t match up with the current situation. Artpe snickered as he gave a further explanation.

“Dark Elves were slow at developing manufacture type skills compared to the regular Elves. Instead, they had a special characteristic. They developed faster in terms of battle magic and skill... Elves are the custodians of the forest. Dark Elves are the guards of the forest.”

“But the Elves are...”

“That’s right. When they saw Dark Elves developing more inclination towards battle, they assumed that the Dark Elves had broken a rule. This was why they were ostracized and chased out of the forest. However, a large number of Dark Elves couldn’t forget about the forest, so most hang around at the outskirts of the forest. They fulfill their roles as guards.”

This was the reason why Mycenae was chased out of the forest. Despite this fact, she tried to protect the forest even as she worked as a merchant. She was able to sense a danger coming towards the forest. Amongst the guards, Mycenae was probably the most active in her efforts to protect the forest. She was also able to get great results.

“Just look at the current situation. The World Tree is in great danger right now. There are several magicians present that are capable of burning down the World Tree. Moreover, there are tens of thousands of knights gathered here. It is a situation where the World Tree is frightened.”

“Is that why it is giving out so many Blessings...?”

“Correct.”

The World Tree was trying to increase the number of guards that would protect it. Then there were the Elves, who were tormented, because they couldn’t understand the significant meaning behind the World Tree’s actions. It was a truly foolish yet funny sight. Of course, in his previous life, it had been a horrible spectacle.

“So why did you insist on creating this scenario, oppa?... ah, I see.”

Sienna watched as more than 50% of the Elves were turned into Dark Elves. She was puzzled, so she started asking Artpe a question. However, she came up with the answer by herself. She nodded her head.

Until now, the Elves had always been victimized by humans. They didn't have the power to protect the forest. Elves were either kidnapped or cursed by the humans. Even if one summarized the history of the humiliation suffered at the hands of the humans, it would be enough to fill three 500 page books.

Despite this fact, the Elves didn't think about accepting and nurturing the Dark Elves, who were superior in terms of martial prowess. Instead, they were busy kicking the Dark Elves out of the forest once they were born. Of course, this was why the power of the forces within the Forest of Eternity never grew.

In the end, Aedia and Tiata moved in against the Forest of Eternity, because they were weak. What would have happened if they hadn't kicked out the high level Dark Elves like Mycenae. If those Dark Elves were put into a squad, would the curse be able to take hold inside the forest? Would the humans easily be able to kidnap Elves for their curse experiments?

“Of course, the perpetrators for creating this situation were the humans. However, the Elves contributed to exacerbate this situation. If they continue to remain in this state, it doesn't matter if I police the humans. There will come a day when they'll experience something similar or worse.”

“I understand now. You want to be fair in punishing both the humans and the Elves.”

“Correct...”

That's right. He hadn't let the situation devolve this far only as a cautionary tale to the humans. He also wanted to feed some bitter medicine to the Elves. He was forcefully changing their way of thinking!

“Evil! Bad!”

“You don't like it?”

“You are too cool!”

Artpe couldn't help but worry about Sienna. As time passed, Sienna's Maetel-ification was getting worse. For now, he decided to treat it as something good.

"Ah. This can't be! The Dark Elves are...!"

While the king of Aedia was fighting Regina, he realized that his plan had gone awry. He let out a shout.

Why?

According to common human social preference, they preferred white skin over brown colored skin. It was a scream that reflected and revealed the truly disgusting desire of humans.

"Your majesty, the situation is getting out of hand! Let's blow up the World Tree! We have to use that spell!"

"Let's do it immediately... Eeeeek, Regina!"

"Agreed. My name is Regina. That is the only thing I received from Aedia."

Regina raised her head. There was a thick black Mana emanating from the king. It was lumpy, and it felt very unpleasant. The thought of his Mana affecting the Elves made it much more unpleasant. She was very annoyed, because she could easily imagine what was going through the king's head.

"Follow me, Regina! This is for the prosperity of Aedia!"

"Aedia is no more. It has fallen..."

She gave a cold reply as she spread both her hands. The king knew he couldn't win against her, so he gave up on destroying the World Tree. He immediately activated his black magic spell.

[Nyaa-ahhhhhh. Nyaa nyaa nyaa-ahhhhhh.]

Roa had reached the end of her patience. She let out an impatient cry as she begged Artpe. Her tail was thumping against his arm. Se was imploring him to put her down. He smirked when he saw this.

"Yes, you've waited for a long time. It's fine now, Roa."

He let go of her leash.

"Eat it all!"

[Nyaa nyaa nyaa nyaa-ahhhhhh!]

Mana was emanating from the king's body, and at that moment, Sienna eyes opened into a fierce gaze.

Aedia and Tiata had casted dark clouds over the Forest of Eternity. The final main character that would pull back dark clouds let out a fierce cry as she shot into the air.

Chapter 100

Even if We Look Different from Each Other (3)

[Nyaa nyaa nyaa nyaa nyaa nyaa nyaa nyaa nyaa nyaa!]

“Wow. Roa is incredibly excited.”

In a flash, the black fog covered the entire region. Roa started sucking in all the negative Mana from the region. This was the most she had eaten, since she was born. The Forest of Eternity was like a buffet to her.

The fruit always tasted sweeter when one refrained from eating it for a long time. She ate all the cursed energy that had sprouted using the Elves as nourishment. She also ate the black magic gathered by the humans. It was the tastiest meal she had eaten up until now.

She had a thought. Maybe, all the curse in this world was gathered to be hers. Roa let out a roar of delight.

[Mee-yahhhhhhhhhng!]

“Koohk. How can this be!?”

Roa’s gluttonous activity immediately affected the king of Aedia and his high ranking nobles.

They had been unscrupulously learning black magic as black magicians. They had been about to use their black magic, but the Greed Beast had abruptly sucked away all the energy in the region. They weren’t able to control their Mana properly.

“The Mana is...”

“No, the magic circle is shattered! This shouldn’t be possible!”

[Nyahhhhhht!]

If their levels were overwhelmingly higher than Roa's level, it might have been a different story. However, Roa had travelled with Artpe, since she was born. As a Greed Beast, she had travelled the Royal Road. In terms of level, she was close in level with the black magicians!

"Huht. This is... Koo-hahk!?"

"Ggoo-ahhhhhh!"

Of course, they became flustered when their spells weren't manifesting properly. Regina used this opportunity to send out a single strike that caused the heads of the nobles to explode. Everyone except for the king had their head cleanly blown off.

If the king of Aedia hadn't quickly brought up his defensive magic, he would have suffered the same fate as them. When he realized this fact, his teeth clenched from fright. He looked towards Regina. However, he didn't have time to wonder why his black magic hadn't activated. He couldn't investigate where the Mana was being sucked away.

"R... Regina! You bitch! How dare you!"

"Lucky. I'm not worried. Let's focus on the business on hand."

She had a vague sense that everything would work out if Artpe was present. However, she hadn't expected him to show up with a magical beast possessing a cheat-like ability.

Anyways, she no longer had to focus on protecting the World Tree. Moreover, the black magic wouldn't be interfering with her either. Since she was freed from such restrictions, Regina could use the full extent of her power, which was about twice as strong as before.

"I am your master! I am your master! How dare a golem go against its master!"

"I am a Demite. I am my own master. I will exercise my free will."

She wasn't a golem. She could do whatever she wanted to do.

"I'm tired of leashes. Even the one around my neck..."

As she squeezed out every ounce of Mana within her, she looked at her surrounding. She saw the tormented Elves. The curse had permeated in their bones, and they had lost their sense of self. For some reason, her eyes landed on Artpe next.

'... denial. That man has always been free. He might have a bit too much freedom.'

When she had traveled with him, she had felt a sense of kinship for a short amount of time. However, she was deluding herself. Artpe liked younger women, and he had acted passionately in an attempt to seduce her. She had been taken in only a little bit.

That was it. Regina took her eyes off of Artpe as she continued to speak.

"...I'm tired of seeing leashes on others too."

"When I said the Elves will obey the humans, that's not what I meant! That's right. I meant I was going to borrow the power of Elves, so we can defend against our outside enemies!"

"Humans are foolish. They keep repeating the same mistakes."

Regina raised both her arms. Her spell was already finished, and she was just waiting for the right moment to unleash it. Regina used the strongest spell in her arsenal. It was an ice type short range ultimate spell. It was the Ice Dragon's Rage.

"However, I am a Demite."

"Regina, wait a moment... Koohk!? Kah-hahk!"

The first stage of the spell released a cold air that nullified and restricted the enemy's Mana and physical movement.

The second stage was an ice storm that condensed into a very small region before being shot. It froze and destroyed one's enemy.

"I will not make the same mistakes."

However, there was no reply. The Ice Dragon's Rage had squarely hit the king of Aedia. There was no trace of him left in this world. He was dead.

"...hoo."

She had killed someone that she had considered to be her master. Regina floated in midair for a brief moment as she took an inventory of herself. She waited to see if anything bad would happen to her. However, nothing happened as time passed.

“Freedom. It really is freedom.”

If she was going to face the consequences for breaking restrictions placed on her as a golem, she would have felt the backlash when she went against the order of waking up the Elves. She would have suffered right when she manifested her explosion spell against the nobles.

She was going through a confirmation process.

“I’ve always been free... my ignorance led me to hardship. This feels much better than being given a leadership role.”

After she reaffirmed her freedom again, she descended from the air. There was nothing around her neck, but she rubbed at her neck with a satisfied expression on her face.

Was it a coincidence?

A sickeningly good looking and merciful magician was waiting for her.

“It’s been awhile. What did you say when we parted ways? A golem follows its master’s order? I think you said something similar... kuh-huhk.”

“Mean.”

Regina was aware of the fact that she was inferior to Artpe in terms of physical capabilities. That was why she had casted a Strengthening spell on her fist as she punched Artpe in the stomach.

“Aren’t you going too far with someone who helped you regain your freedom... kuh-huhk.”

“Mean.”

It was as if she was punching him every time he spoke, so Artpe closed his mouth. Despite this fact, Regina’s assault wasn’t at an end.

“You knew all of this from the start. My situation... you had a complete assessment, yet you were silent. Mean. Mean. Mean.”

“You wouldn’t have believed me even if I told you the truth! Help me, Sienna!”

“Aht. The Elves are suffering from the curse over there! I’ll be right back, oppa!”

“Are you betraying me!?”

Regina was barely able to let go of her vexation after she punched Artpe’s stomach several more times. She pouted as she took two steps backward. Then she lowered her head.

“Thank you.”

“Your way of thanking me is excessive. If you thank me twice, you’ll break couple of my bones.”

“My anger towards you have recharged.”

“No, don’t do it. I’m at fault.”

Regina canceled the spell she was about to use.

She carefully posed a question to Artpe.

“Are the Elves safe?”

“Mmmm. Maybe.”

After speaking those words, Artpe raised his head to survey his surrounding.

The ex-king and the ruling class of Aedia had died by explosion. There was no trace of them left now. The humans in his party just blinked their eyes as they looked on. They couldn’t help but feel despondent. The Elves were gathered below the World Tree as Roa forcefully sucked out all the black magic from them. The process was painful, but it seemed the Elves were more tormented by the fact that they had fallen into being Dark Elves. Roa let out a roar as if to state that she was going to absorb all the negative energy in the region

[Nyaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa!]

"At the very least, they won't be stained by the curse or the black magic. Since most of the energy is being forcefully drawn out of them, their Mana Circuitry will suffer some damage. Still, they'll recuperate from it."

"Even your way of saving them is evil. You are like a candidate for the next Demon King. However, we were fortunate."

"I don't like brats like you, who pick things up too fast."

Artpe gave a reply in jest as he smirked. She already knew that he had induced the change of the Elves into Dark Elves. He had no excuse he could give.

Once the Elves became Dark Elves, they couldn't recover their original skin color. At least half of their population had become Dark Elves. They had only two choices left as a race. They could either accept them or banish them. Of course, half of the Elves would be able to live a better life no matter what decision they came to. That part of Artpe's plan was already a great success.

"Anyways, I have to attempt to speak to them, so I'll have to call Mycenae here... Ooh-ahhhh. She going to scold me. I'm getting depressed just thinking about it."

"...shocked. You have another woman."

"She's my personal merchant."

He immediately cut off Regina's words. He refuted her words. He grinded his teeth as he turned around.

The humans, who had accompanied Artpe to this forest, continue to look on with a dumbfounded expression on their faces. Things were developing in a weird direction.

"Well, we wiped out the remnant of Aedia's ruling power. You guys can go back now."

"But..."

"Are you feeling crappy, because you did nothing?"

"Y... yes. I believe so."

It was as if Artpe had picked out the exact thought that was going through his mind. The king of Daitan frowned as he acknowledged Artpe's words.

Tens of thousands of knights and magicians had been gathered for this heroic venture. They were going to root out the evil men, who had used black magic! However, these evil men had been killed by some unknown girl. A scary magical beast was taking care of the curse and black magic, which had been tormenting the Elves.

Something was most definitely wrong here. They wanted a main role, yet they weren't even allowed to take on a minor role. They felt a sense of loss when they realized that they were mere extras in this story.

"Well, you can take several souvenirs like the Artifact used by the king of Aedia. Since you are heading back, you should also conquer Tiata. Ah. I'll be retrieving Maetel, so the conquest will have to be done through your own power. Are the magicians of Aedia going to cooperate with Daitan?"

"W... we'll cooperate... However, this feeling..."

"What is this unbearable feeling of shame...?"

"It's because... It's because you guys aren't heroes."

No matter how strong one's individuality was, one became a bridesmaid when a hero made his appearance. They were there, so the hero could stand out from the crowd.

Pretty women fell for the hero, and men admired the hero. Old men would marvel at the hero's wisdom, and the lords felt an unbearable urge to hand control of their lands to the hero!

"I see. I guess it can't be helped..."

"Tiata has lost its ruler. If you consolidate and show off the power of Aedia and Daitan, you will be able to resolve this with minimal violence."

"That's... I think so too..."

The king of Daitan gave up on discussing the subject. He retreated. It was ironic that he would have to conquer Tiata with the knights and magicians gathered here. However, his business at the forest had come to an end, so he had no grounds for

butting into Artpe's affairs.

"Well... I'm withdrawing the troops, and we'll head straight towards Tiata."

"Koo-hmm. I don't think our actions will be judged kindly if we head towards Tiata like this..."

"I don't think that's true. In the end, Tiata also participated in this disaster. The ruling class of Aedia and Tiata had committed high crimes. If we are going to search for a new path forward, I believe the king of Daitan is our only option."

"Moreover, the hero is with Daitan."

That's how it was.

Arpte hadn't realized it yet, but Artpe's occupation as the hero played a big part in swaying the opinions of people! This was why they were able to accept this unreasonable situation and retreat.

Of course, Artpe didn't care about the reasoning behind them accepting his orders. He was focused on whether Roa was eating well, and he checked to see if Sienna had enough Mana to treat all the Elves. He raised the communication item, and Maetel immediately answered his call.

[Artpe!]

"The situation has been resolved. I want you to come to the Forest of Eternity right now."

[Yes!]

First, he ordered Maetel to stop acting as a gatekeeper. He told her to come to the forest, then he tried to contact his personal merchant Mycena. It had truly been a while, since he had contacted her. It didn't take too long for her to reply after the transmission had went out...

"Hey, ajumma..."

[*You really contacted in an expedient manner!*] Where are you right now? Were you able to enter Aedia without much problem? Even if you don't need to buy anything from

me, you should have contacted me to let me know you are ok. You didn't contact me for so long, and I was really worried...]

It seems a lot of her feeling piled up, so she unloaded on Artpe with sharp words. She spoke in rapid succession. In an attempt to calm her down, Artpe put emphasis on his next message.

“I finished the Eternal Forest Quest.”

[It would look unseemly if I contacted you first... What? What did you say? May you repeat that again?]

“The Quest has ended, so I want you to give me my reward.”

Mycenae became silent.

Her lifelong wish was granted just like that.

Chapter 101

Even if We Look Different from Each Other (4)

It was unknown as to how much time had passed after the king of Daitan withdrew from the forest with his troops. However, all the curse and black magic filling up the Forest of Eternity were gone. It was as if they hadn't existed in the first place.

[Nyaa啊. Burp.]

All the energy were within the stomach of the little magical beast. She let out a burp.

[Nyaa nyaa nyaa啊.]

“Are you satisfied?”

After she ate every drop of the black magic energy, she flew into Artpe's arms. When he took her into his arms, he could see her full stomach.

“I guess you won't be able to eat anything else if you want to digest all that.”

[Nyaa!? Nyaa nyaa nyaa!]

He wondered if she wasn't a cat. Maybe, her true identity was a pig. Artpe seriously pondered over this thought as he took a step towards Sienna. She was still healing the Elves. However, Regina grabbed his sleeve.

“Demite.”

“Yes... I already know you are a Demite... Ah.”

“Demite.”

Regina's piercing gaze was trying to see into his robe. Of course, he knew what she wanted. Artpe smirked as he took out the Demite. He had succeeding in refining it, and he had also used it in battle for the first time.

“Completed... Demite.”

He was immediately able to focus Regina's gaze on the Demite. Her eyes twinkled. She looked so innocent that it was hard to believe that she had blown up numerous people not too long ago. He couldn't help but laugh.

“Yes. Here.”

“Present?”

“Are you trying to swindle me? You can look at the Demite. You should learn about the proper relationship between a Demite and its magician.”

“Proper relationship...”

When the Demite was handed over into Regina's hands, the Demite let out a much luminescent more light. She carefully observed the Demite. The Demite in her hand also realized her identity, so it vibrated as it let out a light.

“This is the first time I've seen Demites communicate with each other. Ah. First...”

It was a sight he hadn't seen in his past life. As the owner of the Read All Creation ability, his curious was peaked. However, his party member was under hardship, so he couldn't leave this matter unsettled. Artpe left the two Demites alone, and he approached Sienna.

“Heal!”

“H... human... Thank you. Koo-ooh.”

“Heal! Please stay here and rest.”

She was healing the Elves through Mana that negate all magic. The curse and the black magic had created bruises and tears in their Mana Circuitry. She healed the Mana Circuitry, and she eased their body and soul.

“Ah, oppa.”

“Don't over do it, Sienna.”

“No, I’m fine. The Elves need to be healed right now.”

Normally, she was overlooked, because she traveled with Artpe and Maetel. However, she had already shot past level 260, and she had reached full maturity in her skills. As a special race characteristic of an Evil Reflector, she possessed overwhelmingly more Mana than a human of equal level.

In the brief amount of time, she had already healed close to a thousand Elves. Despite this fact, she had energy to spare.

“If you’ve regained your energy, please bring the other Elves here!”

“Koo-mmm. Since you are the one requesting it...”

“I never realized there was someone amongst the humans that possessed such a kind smile.”

As a race, the Elves had a lot of pride. However, the curse had messed with their emotions, and this was followed up by an invasion of the forest by humans. As a cherry on top, the Dark Elf-ification phenomena had occurred. Their state of mind of ragged right now.

Was that the cause?

The Elves had acted as if the world had ended, but they slowly started moving as if they were being saved by Sienna’s pure voice.

However, the positive turn to the situation hadn’t ended there.

“My god. The elder really did become a Dark Elf.”

“If we follow the rules of the forest, we cannot stay in contact with the Dark Elves. It seems the elder did something so egregious that it made him fall...”

“Maybe, something went wrong. We moved with one goal in mind. How could we have broken a rule in such a short amount of time?”

They were suspicious as to why such an abnormally large number of Dark Elves had formed. The Elves had perpetuated a foolish mistake over the long years. A couple of Elves that were brave enough to face the mistake headon started to make their

presence known.

"If they did something bad enough to turn them into Dark Elves, shouldn't we have turned into Dark Elves too?"

"No, the World Tree is never wrong!"

"What if it isn't the World Tree... What if we had been wrong from the start?"

"...what?"

Artpe hadn't desired to give Daitan the victory, and he hadn't wanted to bring down Aedia. Maybe, the event that was occurring right now was something he desired more than stopping the World Tree from burning.

"No, that can't be. That can't be."

"How could it not be? We were cursed by the humans, so we were moving with one heart. So why would some become Dark Elves, while others remain as Elves... Is it really true that the Dark Elves are born, because they had broken a rule?"

"You shouldn't even doubt that!"

"What if that is the truth... What does that imply about us? We've been chasing out the Dark Elves under that assumption."

"That is..."

"You are now a Dark Elf."

"You too."

When one Dark Elf was born, it was easy to chase out that individual. It was easy to expel someone from a homogenous group. They hadn't given much thought to it.

However, almost half their number had become Dark Elves. The Elves were unsure about what they had to do. Wives would be separated from their husbands. Children would be separated from their parents. There would be too many cases where this would happen.

“Still, we can’t let this be.”

“I’m sure we did something wrong.”

“Aren’t we all the same! Are you going to chase all of us out, because we became Dark Elves?!”

The Elves felt bitter, but the Elves couldn’t truly admit that they had been wrong. Still, if they continued to discriminate between Dark Elves and Elves, the community would break apart. They had no choice but to modify their way of thinking.

However, Artpe was satisfied with this result.

In the end, they would no longer be able to ostracize the Dark Elves.

Those that used to ostracize Dark Elves had become Dark Elves themselves. If they wanted legitimacy within the community, they couldn’t spout nonsense such as the Dark Elves were an abomination.

“All right. Everything is perfect now.”

After being healed, the Elves and Dark Elves were helping each other. Artpe mumbled to himself. He was content.

This was something that never occurred in his past life, and in the end, the Elves had met a tragic end. On top of that, he had stopped an outbreak of black magic. Of course, he felt pleased.

Sienna watched it all, and it was so ridiculous that she had to refute his words.

“You lowered everyone to create equality... Oppa’s way is too violent.”

“I’m not only creating equality. It looks like the only thing the Elves are capable of doing is chew grass. In the future, they will have to face the Demon King’s army. It’ll be more helpful to have Dark Elves, who are more suited for battle.”

“...”

Sienna was about to send a Heal spell towards the Elves, but she froze in place. After her body relaxed, she tilted her head in puzzlement as she sent a Heal spell towards Artpe.

After Artpe had entered the forest, he hadn't even received a scratch on his body. Therefore, nothing changed when Artpe received the Heal spell. When Sienna saw this, she exaggerated the surprise she was feeling.

"This is strange. I don't feel any evil energy from you."

"Did you just have rude thoughts about me?"

"Yes. Still, it is fortunate that oppa is a human."

"You really did have rude thoughts about me."

Artpe grumbled as he moved to help Sienna. Since Maetel wasn't here, he couldn't share his Mana with Sienna. Instead, he used his magical energy to repair some of the damage done to the forest. He was able to erase the traces of the destruction caused by Roa and the magicians.

"Artpe!"

Artpe was unsure as to how long he had started the repair work in earnest, but it didn't take too long for Maetel to jump into his arms. She had quickly covered the grounds between the kingdom of Tiata and the Forest of Eternity. Artpe received her in a familiar manner, and he placed her down.

"Everything is already over!?"

"Yes. Since you are here, you should transfer some of my Mana to Sienna."

"You really are too much!"

However, she obediently followed Artpe's words. Artpe meditated as he quickly gathered the Mana in the forest and the world. He handed it over to Maetel, and Maetel transferred it all to Sienna.

Lastly, a healing light emanated from Sienna's hands! The Elves, who were scattered all over the place, regained their vitality from the light. It took only several hours to heal hundreds of thousands of Elves.

"Thank you, human. Your name is Sienna?"

“You trespassed into the forest, and you burned the trees. That can’t be forgiven...”

“However, they didn’t raise their weapons towards the Elves. It is said that we should treat the World Tree like our mother. If their actions were done to save the World Tree...”

“...we’ve decided to accept you as guests. Our greeting is a bit late, but we welcome you into the forest.”

Since they were allowing the Dark Elves to stay, were the Elves becoming more lenient in other aspects? Artpe was a bit taken back by the overly positive reaction from the Elves. Fortunately, he would be able to pass on the baton to someone else. She would become flustered instead of him.

“M... my god. I wondered what was going on when I didn’t see any Elves guarding the forest’s borders. What the hell...”

It was the Dark Elf Mycenae. She had also rushed through the forest with a heavy-laden cart in tow.

“Artpe-nim, what the hell did you do! Over half of the forest is made out of Dark Elves!”

“I have no idea what happened. Everything is taken care of by my secretary...”

“You don’t have a secretary!”

When she saw Artpe’s sly smile, she couldn’t trust his words. However, she didn’t think Artpe could corrupt the Elves en masse. That would be too ridiculous. Mycenae could only grind her teeth as she tried to figure out how Artpe was related to all of this.

“Aren’t you Mycenae...”

“Why are you in this forest... Koo-hmmm. That came out wrong”

Until couple hours ago, these Elves had discriminated against the Dark Elves. They were about to threaten Mycenae, but they shut their mouths.

“Mycenae!”

“It really is Mycenae!”

A portion of the Elves, who had been friendly with Mycena before she was kicked out, came forward to grab her hands. They were the Elves that still missed her.

"Mycena, it is ok for you to return to the forest now. We admit that we were wrong. Being a Dark Elf doesn't mean you've fallen!"

"Mycena, I'm really glad you came!"

"You guys..."

She was dazed as she grabbed the hands of her friends. When she turned to look at the other Elves, she realized that they were all of the same mind.

What the hell happened within the forest!

Her mouth automatically fell open.

"Artpe-nim, what's happened here?"

"It'll take too long to explain it fully, so I'll give you a summarized version."

Artpe looked at the Elves gathered beneath the World Tree as he spoke.

"The fight with the humans is over. I negotiated a treaty with the head of the humans, and they will never interfere in the matters of the Forest of Eternity. Therefore, you guys don't have to worry about fighting against the humans."

"How can this be...?"

"There's no reason to fight?"

"...that's right."

The Elves nodded his head. The Elves had acted in a war-like manner, because they were under the influence of the curse. Now that the curse was gone, they didn't feel the need to fight against the humans!

Artpe smirked as he continued to speak.

"Your minds were being dominated by a curse and black magic. At some level, you

know this fact, since the curse had been extracted. It was a plan hatched by the magic kingdom of Aedia. They were trying to lure you guys outside of the forest. It would have weakened your defense, and they would have burned down the World Tree. They put shackles around your minds to dominate you. It was a disaster created by desires of humans. The plan isn't something new. It had been going on for dozens of years."

The World Tree had determined that the Elves and itself were in great danger, so it tried to mass produce Dark Elves to prevent their demise. At that point, Artpe had achieved his goal, and he had unleashed Roa. She had put an end to everything. Of course, as a bonus, Regina had declared her independence.

"I killed every human that had committed crimes against you all. That is why I don't want you to be antagonistic towards the humans that are blameless. This is for the good of humans and your race. Lastly, it is for the good of the world."

"For the good of the world...?"

One of the Elves queried him. She was middle-aged Elf that had been turned into a Dark Elf. She was also one of the elders.

Of course, middle-aged meant that the Elf had lived for several hundred years. If it was her, she would have understood the meaning behind his words. Artpe nodded his head as he spoke.

"Yes, it is for the world. You don't have the luxury to fight against the humans. Moreover, you don't have the luxury to fight with Dark Elves, who are of the same race as the Elves."

"That means..."

"Yes."

Since the humans had already found about it, there was nothing holding him back. Artpe played his trump card. It was a master spell that allowed him to lead all situation towards his advantage.

"We are heroes. We are here to stop the fight between humans vs humans and humans vs other races. We are here to give you a warning against the domination by the Demon King's army..."

He attempted to reveal their identity.

Chapter 102

Even if We Look Different from Each Other (5)

It was hard to travel around, while hiding the fact that they were heroes. On the other hand, it was very easy for Artpe and Maetel to prove that they were heroes. They just needed to use at least two skill. Each skill had to be from a different Class.

“Oh oh. They really are a hero!”

“I should have realized it when humans willingly helped us.”

“So why isn’t Sienna a hero?”

After the Elves confirmed that Artpe and Maetel were heroes, they let go of every bad feelings they had against Artpe’s party. This is what being a hero was all about. Their mere existence allowed them to be welcomed by everyone, excluding Demons. They were cheat-like existence that received absolute support from everyone.

In certain aspects, it was a lonely path. Everyone had a preconceived notion of the heroes even before they met the heroes. They looked at the heroes with enviable eyes, and they stipulated rules that the heroes had to follow. They expected the heroes to act within their ideals. The individuality of the heroes were ignored. The only thing left to the heroes were their duty and achievements. It would be a lie to say that he didn’t find it annoying.

“Oh, heroes. Please come this way. The current situation is a bit... We’ll prepare some tea for you.”

“Mycenae has a contract with us as a merchant. Treat her well.”

“M... mmmm. We planned on doing so. You should come with us, Mycenae.”

“...yes.”

However, Artpe didn’t care what other people thought about him, and he didn’t care for their rules. Artpe’s motto was to use whatever he could exploit.

He hadn't revealed their status as heroes before, because he didn't want to become entangled with the Demon King's army. However, he was about to start his activities in earnest. There were plenty of goodies he could eat by using his status as heroes. He had no plan on passing upon these opportunities.

"Are there any more injured Elves?"

"Aside from the heroes, all the humans have left the forest. Moreover, all the trace of the curse was erased..."

"Since the heroes have made their appearance, I'm sure the Demon King's army is on the move somewhere. It seems all the Elves should start getting ready for war... yes. We'll do so with the Dark Elves."

The situation was pretty much wrapped up. Aside from Artpe's party and the elders, the Elves dispersed to go do their work.

The remaining group moved to a nearby home. It was the home of an elder.

"This is a tea brewed from leaves that are periodically dropped by the World Tree."

Artpe's party was served the world's greatest tea, which couldn't be purchased even if one had money. Artpe used his Read All Creation to look into the tea cup. He watched as the liquid let out a soft blue light. He let out an exclamation when he confirmed the tea was truly made with the World Tree's leaves.

"Wow. I can't believe these survived that mess."

"If the odd emotional amplification status had continued, this village might have been wiped out..."

Fortunately, the heroes appeared before that could happen."

The Elves had aged the World Tree's leaves with great care. Its clear, sweet and refreshing taste was secondary to the effect it had on a magician's Mana. It permanently cleared up one's Mana. It was a treasure that all magician's wanted to drink in their lifetime!

However, these leaves never exited the Forest of Eternity. Even those that lived within the Forest of Eternity didn't get many opportunity to drink it. This precious tea was

served to them, because they had revealed themselves to be heroes. At this moment, Artpe had never been so happy for being a hero.

“Artpe, this is bitter. It isn’t tasty.”

“All right. I knew you would say that. Just eat the candy I prepared for you.”

“Yes!”

Artpe wanted to seal Maetel’s mouth, so he put a candy in her mouth. He pushed Maetel’s tea towards Mycena.

“Ah. This is...”

Mycena was blameless, yet she was self-conscious as she looked towards the elder. Like her, the elder possessed dark brown skin color. When the elder nodded her head, Mycena’s ears moved slightly as she took up the tea cup. When she took a sip, a smile of delight appeared on her face.

“I heard the Dark Elves aren’t liked by the humans...”

“It was caused by the attitude of the Elves. The humans followed the example set by the Elves. They looked down on the Dark Elves. However, I hate being prejudiced against someone based on their external appearance.”

“You are saying that the difference between Elves and Dark Elves are only superficial... Do you perhaps know the difference between an Elf and a Dark Elf?”

“Even if I do tell you the difference, will you be able to go against the preconceived notion you guys have kept for hundred of years?”

“Our preconceived notions have already been flipped, so we’ll be fine. If we stick to our preconceived notions, the Elves won’t be able to avoid our own destruction.”

When Artpe heard the elder’s word, he realised the elder was right. Maybe, this elder was trying to borrow the power of the heroes to settle the current situation.

“All right. I’ll give you a simplified explanation.”

This was something Artpe had wanted to do, so he nodded his head. He gladly gave an

explanation.

"It is true that the Dark Elves were created by the World Tree. I'm sure you guys have already realized that this didn't happen through an internal power."

"Yes, that is why we thought it was a punishment meted out by the World Tree."

"So why do you think it is a punishment to develop darker skin and an inclination towards fighting?"

"That is..."

The elder was silent. This was a common perception that was set in stone for couple hundred of years. It was something they considered to be obvious, but when one looked at it through a new perspective, they realized that it was a prejudiced view that didn't make any logical sense.

In this aspect, Elves weren't too different from humans. They had preconceived notions based on aesthetics. The humans valued light skin over dark skin. It was the same for the Elves. This was why they considered it a 'problem' when an Elf's skin turned dark.

"However, the World Tree views the world through different eyes from you guys. It isn't a punishment. It is a blessing. You have been turned into a Dark Elf. You can probably feel this now. The benefits you gained from the forest has decreased, but in turn, your battle capabilities were boosted. Isn't it so?"

"That is... You are correct."

"In an attempt to protect itself, the World Tree chose aggressive and lively Elves to be turned into Dark Elves. The predominant opinion that Dark Elves are fallen beings came to be, because they are more active. This is why the probability of them getting into accidents is higher. You probably all know what I'm talking about, right?"

"Koo-ook..."

"Koo-ook."

Mycenae had been meekly drinking her tea from the side as her ears twitched, yet she received splash damage from his words. It seemed she truly was a troublemaker during her stay in the Forest of Eternity.

"I just told you that this was all done to protect the World Tree, right? Of course, the number Dark Elves would increase when the World Tree is in danger. Do you understand what I'm trying to say?"

"...I see. That is why earlier..."

"That's right. It seems you have a complete understanding now."

It wasn't an exaggeration to say that the World Tree had faced a danger that would have killed it. This was why it had gone nuts in giving out Blessings to create the Dark Elves. There was almost a 1:1 ratio of Elves to Dark Elves now.

"How can this be..."

His explanation sounded very plausible. There was a causal relationship, and she couldn't use logic to dispute Artpe's explanation. The elders were at a loss for words. It was so simple that the elders wondered why they couldn't have come up with it. That was how foolish they had been. She let out a sigh as she mumbled to herself.

"I just wanted an excuse I could tell everyone."

"You finally revealed your true intent."

Since events had turned out like this, it was necessary for the Elves and the Dark Elves to live together. However, they might ostracize each other without realizing it.

What if Artpe's words were spread through the elders? If everyone believed the words of a hero... They would be able to preemptively prevent the misapprehension between the Elves and the Dark Elves.

Artpe was satisfied with achieving just that.

"Hero, how do you know all of his?"

"That is my ability. I can see much more than others."

"..."

At his words, the elder automatically nodded her head.

“Innate Ability... I knew that there was a unique Mana gathered in your eyes, so I knew it was something extraordinary. I never expected it to be a hero’s Innate Ability. This generation’s hero is amazing.”

“This generation’s hero...”

Artpe suddenly had a thought. The Elves were a long-lived race. There were information that Artpe didn’t know about. Maybe they knew about it.

“Do you know about the hero that was my predecessor?”

“I do.”

As expected! Artpe made a fist as he asked the question.

“So you met him? What kind of a person was my sunbae-nim?”

“He was a very confident man that was full of drive. However, if you were to ask me if his skills were absolute... I do not think so.”

Artpe’s party had encountered two altars, and the hero had written his own praise on these altars. It was unexpected to hear a negative appraisal of the past hero. Artpe nodded his head inside, then he gestured for the elder to continue.

“He was an extremely normal man. Of course, he held the title of hero, so the Elves treated him with utmost respect... I didn’t get close to him. Somehow, it felt as if he had bad intentions towards me.”

“Mmm. I think he was just a playboy...”

“That is all I know about him. At the time, the war between the human realm and the Demon world didn’t reach the Forest of Eternity. The hero said he didn’t want the war to spread, so he went to the Demon world. Afterwards, he really ended the war.”

He said he would end it by himself by entering the Demon world, and he had done what he set out to do. It seemed his power was indisputable. Moreover, he was able travel around leisurely afterwards, since he had left traces of himself behind. It was clear as to who had won.

“Do you have any other information? For example, do you know where he visited

before?"

"I do not. He wasn't that friendly with the Elves..."

She wasn't that helpful. Artpe clicked his tongue as he changed the subject.

"All right. I'll find that out by myself. I want to propose a course of action for you guys. It is one of the reason why I came to the Forest of Eternity..."

"Since we've spent time with your predecessor, I know what you are going to say. It isn't just the humans that will have to fight against the Demon king's army. The Elves will fight too, and we will get ready for war..."

"No, that won't be enough. That is why you guys weren't that helpful to the previous hero."

Artpe didn't want to see the catastrophe from his past life repeat itself. This was why he had come to the Forest of Eternity. The next most important reason was to awaken Regina. (Regina was standing next to Artpe as she played with the Demite.)

However, Artpe didn't think like a humanitarian.

"I need you all to get ready for war in earnest. You'll have to push harder. Let me see if I can put it in a different way. I want you guys to 'cultivate' yourselves. I think that's the right expression."

"...what?"

All the elders answered back with the same question. Artpe had a serious expression on his face as he made the request.

"Give me the map to this forest. Now."

"M... map?"

In some aspects, the Elves put more trust in a hero's words than humans. Humans couldn't let go of their greed even when the threat of the Demon king's army was right in front of them. Elves weren't like that.

They were able to think logically, and they were able to sacrifice for the greater good.

The heroes had made their appearance, and the presence of the Demon king's army was exposed. Artpe knew what they had to focus on right now.

"What is this...?"

The Elves gathered in the elder's house were focused on the map within Artpe's hand. The map had been clean when it left the elder's hands. There were dozens of circles drawn on the map.

"There are many Dungeons in this forest. This place is known for having one of the highest concentration of Mana in the human realm. Of course, there are Dungeons here."

"We haven't found that many Dungeons..."

"It's because you guys aren't heroes' Anyways, each circle represents a Dungeon..."

This was something he had provided Silpennon in the past. It was the hero's Dungeon map! Artpe kindly separated each Dungeon by levels. When the elders received the Dungeon map of the forest, they were struck dumb.

"How...?"

"His Innate Ability could even see that..."

"My god. Our forest had so many Dungeons."

"Kyaaa, Artpe-nim! How can you just give away a map containing such precious information!"

"You dork. You should be on the side of the Elves."

Artpe flicked Mycenae on the forehead as he spoke.

"The Dark Elves are more suited towards battle. I want you to create parties centered around the Dark Elves, and I want you to send them into the Dungeons. I want you guys to fix your lazy way of thinking. I want you to cultivate your levels and battle capabilities."

"T... the Dungeons are full of the unknown. If casualties occur..."

"It is better than being wiped out by the Demon king's army. Moreover, I'm the one holding back the humans right now. What are you going to do when I'm gone? What if humans become tempted by the Forest of Eternity again? You should prepare for that day in advance. It won't be a bad choice to cultivate the Elves."

Artpe's explanation was eloquent! It felt wrong, but the elders accepted his words as they bit their lips.

"I've labeled the level of the Dungeons. If you want a more safer Dungeon run than this, you are better off working the fields. Well, what do you want to do?"

"We..."

"We'll have to ask the opinions of the other Elves..."

"No."

All the elders were showing caution except for the elder that was turned into a Dark Elf. She firmly bit her lips as she shook her head from side to side.

"If we are of one mind, the rest of the Elves will follow. This might be a good opportunity. The invasion of the humans and the Dark Elf-ification of the Elves have created confusion amongst us. We should let them focus on battle and growing their level. I believe that will allow the Elves to overcome the confusion."

"But..."

"There is no downside to this. The hero was kind enough to tell us the level of the Dungeons. We'll be able to minimize the risk. Moreover, we have to grow. That is the best way not to be threatened by the humans. The hero is correct. If we don't accept this, we'll stagnate. In the end, we'll disappear into history like the Ancient Mermaid race..."

"Koo-hoo. You are right... However..."

The Ancient Mermaid race, which the elder had just spoken about, had been revived. However, Artpe didn't feel the need to tell them that.

He asked them a question.

“So what are you going to do?”

“We...”

The Elves and Dark Elves exchanged gazes. The Elves exchanged bitter smiles.

This was only the beginning to the wave of change that swept over the Elves.

Chapter 103

Even if We Look Different from Each Other (6)

After the elders had a serious discussion in front of the forest's Dungeon map, they agreed to Artpe's wishes. The elders gathered the Elves, and they delivered Artpe's will to them. The elders thought there would be a lot of backlash, but the situation flowed in a smooth manner.

At a basic level, they were obedient towards heroes. Moreover, there were a lot of Elves that had been won over by Sienna's healing magic. However, the decisive factor was the fact that everyone personally felt the need to change. They knew what choice they had to make if they wanted their race to persevere and prosper.

The appearance of the heroes implied that the Demon king's army was mobilizing. However, this wasn't the only reason why the Elves were choosing this route. Could the body of these small heroes really block the desires of all the other races focused on the Elves?

The recent calamity could happen again in the future. The Elves didn't want to repeat their past mistake. This was why the Elves and Dark Elves cooperated with each other in earnest. Moreover, they had to cultivate themselves too. They had to do so to protect the Elves and the World Tree.

"Mmm. My plan worked. I didn't block it too early, and I didn't block it too late. I blocked it at the most appropriate moment... Mmm. Should I call this the half-cooked technique?"

"As expected, Artpe-nim manipulated this situation..."

The Elves and the Dark Elves were gathered underneath the World Tree. The Elven elders divided them into several thousand parties. Artpe watched all of this with a satisfied smile on his face. Mycenae approached him, and she spoke to Artpe.

"No, I just blocked it at the right time."

"Therefore, you knew how the situation would develop, and you directed the events

to progress to the timing you desired. Am I wrong?"

When he replied in a sly manner, Mycenae pouted. He grinned when he saw that.

"This was for ajumma too. Look over there. I don't know what they are thinking inside, but at the very least, the Elves and Dark Elves are treating each other equally on the surface. Your friends can give you a welcome back party without worrying about the consequences. The married couples won't have to separate, because they are Elf or Dark Elf."

"Even if you say such words, I won't fall for Artpe-nim anew. Also, I'm not an ajumma. Please call me by Mycenae."

Her reply was gruff, but Mycenae's ears were fluttering in happiness. He could see a group of Elves, who were of similar age as Mycenae, watching her. About half of them had turned into Dark Elves. It was hopelessly funny.

"Hoo-ooh. I didn't want to return like this."

It seemed she realized where Artpe's gaze was headed. Mycenae grumbled in a sullen manner. When Artpe answered her, his voice turned a little bit kinder.

"One doesn't become corrupted when one becomes a Dark Elf. Ajumma, you are a Dark Elf, but you shouldn't be embarrassed about that fact. You shouldn't feel a sense of loss, because your friends became Dark Elves."

"However, choice wasn't given to me or those children over there."

"That's true."

However, how many things in life could be chosen for oneself? One could be born as a Demon, human or a different race. Then there were the Classes. Most of it was predetermined, and it couldn't be changed. How broad was one's freedom? It was a difficult subject to talk about.

"That is why ajumma should make hell within the limits you are given. That is the only freedom we have. That is the freedom we can enjoy."

"If your conclusion hadn't headed towards such a fucked up direction, it would have been very nice... Eh-whew. Anyways, I only have minor complaints. Otherwise, you

carried out the Quest perfectly.”

Mycenae let out a sigh as she took out a small crystal bottle. There was slightly translucent liquid within the bottle. The five cardinal colors were emitted when the liquid was shaken.

“This is the reward for this Quest. I lived in the human world for hundr... a long time! This is the most precious item I’ve acquired over the years as a veteran merchant. Of course, Artpe-nim stopped the threat from the humans. You also stopped the conflict between the Elves. You did it in one fell swoop, so this is weak compared to your...”

“It isn’t weak. It’s an elixir.”

Artpe was so taken aback that he replied in a slightly dumbfounded manner. Mycenae let out a gentle laughter as she explained herself.

“If it is a true elixir, how would I have been able to acquire it?”

“That’s true, but... Give it to me.”

He quickly took the item from Mycenae, and he meticulously looked over it with his Read All Creation ability.

[Imperfect Elixir]

[When the highest of magic and alchemy is combined, this reagent of eternal youth and immortality forms. It took a miracle to form this genuine elixir, but the alchemist infused other medicinal herbs and magic stones to increase the volume of the elixir. Of course, the effect of the elixir became diluted, and a side effect arose. There’s a low probability of death if one took this elixir. Despite this fact, the worth of this elixir is worth more than any other pure drugs.]

“Ah, it is an incomplete product.”

“Of course. This particular alchemist trades with me on a regular basis. He miraculously created the Elixir, but unfortunately, the quantity he created was too small. That is why he tried all kinds of methods to increase the quantity, and this was the result. Of course, his reputation would suffer if he sold it as an elixir, which is worth a lot. Moreover, he had incurred many debts in the pursuit of creating this elixir. That is why he had to sell the Imperfect Elixir at a cheap price.”

“It is a coup worthy of a veteran merchant...”

Somehow, his words made her stick out her chest in pride as she exhaled through her nose. Her shoulders were retracted in a boastful manner.

“Hue hue. You are acknowledging me as a high rank Merchant?”

That’s right. Mycenae had acquired her Achievement during the battle against the Kraken, and she was able to smoothly advance into the high rank Merchant Class!

Artpe snorted when he saw her show off. He once again checked the content of the crystal bottle. It was letting out a mysterious light. He knew that it was imperfect, yet he was tempted to drink it. It had that much of an allure.

“Y... you can’t just drink it! If it’s Artpe-nim, I thought you would have a way to use this...”

“I know. As a reward for the Quest, you gave me defective goods. Ajumma, you have a lot of guts.”

“You are saying that when you received the item as if you were mesmerized?”

He wondered what he should do with it. The thought that immediately came to mind was the Reinforcement skill. If the other added ingredients were causing the imbalance, he could Reinforce these ingredients to harmonize the added ingredients with the Elixir. He thought it could work.

However, it wasn’t time yet. He might need more ingredients, and he determined that his Reinforcement skill was still lacking.

“Anyways, this is acceptable.”

Artpe put away the elixir into his Dimensional Pouch, and he declared the Quest to be completed.

However...

“W... what if it had been unacceptable?”

Mycenae squirmed as she spoke those words. The fluttering of her ears became worse.

On top of that, her face was dyed red.

"There is something else I can give... Do you want me to give it to you?"

Her lips trembled, and her hands moved in a very mysterious manner. Artpe instinctively shook his head from side to side.

"Nope. I'm fine."

"Eeeeeek!"

He had merely turned down the extra pay, yet Mycenaе expressed her anger.

"You are too much! I did my utmost to come to this resolution! It is a once in a lifetime resolution, yet it was all naught...!"

"It's all right. I'm fine with receiving just this"

At Artpe's kind reply, Mycenaе's body trembled. When he saw this, a smile formed on his lips.

"You should go to your friends. They are waiting for you."

"Ah ah. They are so tactless... Enough of this! Even if you ask me to do it, I won't do it!"

She looked as she was about to cry as she turned around. Artpe called out her name at that moment.

"Mycenaе."

"What!"

"Please continue to take care of me in the future. Don't think about taking root in the Forest of Eternity."

"...hmmph."

She hesitated for a brief moment. Then she snorted as she walked away. She didn't even look back as she spoke.

"I am contracted to be your personal merchant. I can't run away even if I wanted to!"

Mycenae's ears fluttered as she went to the Elves, who were waiting for her. He shrugged his shoulders as he turned around.

"You used your status as the hero. Very popular. You are the worst..."

"Hey you..."

Regina was there. Thankfully, he had sensed her with his Read All Creation ability. If not, his heart would have stopped from being surprised.

"I quietly waited here until you finished talking. He rejected the older woman. I'm impressed by his attitude. He cut her off like a knife."

"You don't even bat an eye now as you spout bullshit."

"I'm talking to Pipi."

"Who is Pipi... Hey."

Regina carefully extended the Demite towards him. It floated above her two palms as it let out a bright light. There was a ribbon decorated around the body of the Demite. Was the Demite trying to look pretty? Artpe was truly puzzled by it...

"Name. Pipi."

"Hell no."

"Pipi."

"You probably just want to give it a pretty name, but I have to use it when I chant my magic! I'm the one that'll be embarrassed!"

"I don't care. Pipi."

It was truly unfortunate. When Regina spoke the word Pipi each time, the Demite twirled in the air as it let out a brighter light. It seemed the name had been imprinted. If he knew it was going to turn out like this, he would have named it before handing it over to Regina!

“The right relationship between the Demite and a magician... I heard it from Pipi.”

“...yes. What do you think about it?”

After he resigned himself to the situation, he put Pipi away. Regina slightly nodded her head as she gave an explanation.

“Demite’s Gemstone is unable to think and act on its own. A high ranking magician can refine it. The contract between the two starts at that moment.”

“That’s right.”

“The refinement of the Demite is a form of contract. Demite receives this service, and in turn, a partnership is formed. The magician supports the Demite, and the Demite supports the magician.”

A Demite couldn’t do much by itself. It couldn’t move freely. Moreover, it was hard for them to make specific decisions and movements. This was why a contract was made when a magician refined a Demite. It allowed a Demite to experience the world alongside the magician. It allowed their Record and Level to grow...

“It recognizes freedom. The partnership between a magician and a Demite... Freedom.”

She was correct. The Demite couldn't do anything by itself. The magician finding and refining a Demite was already a huge boon for the Demite.

The Demite had exited the palace when Silepennon had escaped the palace. Until that moment, the Demite had lived a lonely existence within the darkness for several hundred years. That was why the Demite was eternally thankful to Artpe for finding and refining the Demite.

“Pipi likes you.”

“Are you able to accept it?”

“I accept it.”

Regina didn’t hesitate as she nodded her head. She was finally able to understand that the fate of the Demite and her had changed in many ways thanks to him. Moreover,

Pipi was living the correct life of a Demite. It was enjoying its freedom.

"I started off wrong. It was a mixture of greed by the humans and my ignorance. My situation was the worst..."

"Still, they did refine you, so you were able to think and act for yourself. They gave you a great amount of freedom. You probably felt thankful, and you would have formed a contract with the magicians in order to help them... However, they did you wrong by trying to control you through the magic of suggestion."

"I labored for 200 years. I did enough. I'm free."

She took the lives of her masters to balance the sheets. It was a very brutal calculation. However, when he saw the smile appear on her face, he became indifferent to her methods.

"Well, it is time for you to give me an answer regarding my proposal."

"Refused."

Huh? He thought the two of them were in a good place, yet she had refused him! It seemed he had timed it wrong!

"My ability to make decisions is still lacking. I don't want to make a rash decision. Not possible."

"...I see."

From knowing her sense of value, he thought she would willingly join the hero's party. However, Artpe wanted to respect Regina's free will. That is why he didn't argue any further.

"It can't be helped. I understand. I'll give up."

After landing on Aedia, he had gone through a lot of trouble as he travelled through Daitan, Tiata and the Forest of Eternity. At that moment, one of his biggest goals for traveling to these places had gone up in smoke. However, Artpe didn't look too devastated.

'I've completely removed her restraints. When the Demon King's army mobilizes, she

will inevitably join our side. At the very least, she won't become enslaved by the Demon King's Innate Ability if she knows about it.'

Why did he purposely reform her consciousness to bring out her free will? First, he wanted to free her from the shackles placed on her by Aedia. After enslaving the Demon race, the Demon King was trying to turn humans into Demons. The Demon king was trying to rule over everyone, and Artpe knew what Regina would do when she found out about it! It was the ultimate strategy where he would be able to kill multiple birds with one stone.

"Instead, I want a contract."

"Huh?"

He thought she wanted nothing to do with him, so the words coming out of Regina's mouth were a bit unexpected.

"I want to form a contract with you like Pipi. I'll support you with my power. I want you to help me grow mentally and physically. Mutual dependence."

"That is a bit..."

"Contract."

Artpe was about to reject her cleanly, but he saw the worried look on her face. He shut his mouth.

'...I see.'

Regina had just been freed from her bondage from the humans. However, her sense of self had yet to be ripened. Her power was much greater than her mind.

Maybe she was afraid?

If she made a rash choice, the consequences of her actions would be massive. She was well aware of this fact. In truth, her most recent actions exemplified this. She had easily killed the king of a country.

"Contract."

“...all right. Let’s form a contract. However, if you think I’m wrong, you should learn how to speak up.”

“Agreed.”

“Of course, I’ll probably ignore you and do what I want.”

“Hate you.”

Artpe lightly evaded Regina’s punch, then he extended his hand towards her. For a brief moment, Regina didn’t understand the meaning behind his gesture, so she tilted her head in confusion. Soon, she carefully extended her hand, and she grabbed Artpe’s hand. A little bit of color appeared on her pale cheeks.

“Your heart is breaking to touch me. I’ll allow a little bit.”

“You can just go away.”

This was how the hero’s party forcefully united Aedia and Tiata under the rule of Daitan. The mess within the Forest of Eternity was put to sleep, and they were successful in bringing the Archmage Regina into the hero’s party.

The process was so bumpy that his thigh was figuratively bruised. However, he was able to end the Quest cleanly.

“Maetel, why did you wait up for me...”

“Artpe, come lie next to me.”

“Hey, wait a moment. I did nothing wrong.”

“I know everything. Just lie next to me.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

The night in the Forest of Eternity came to an end as Artpe had overcome a minor crisis where his virginity could have been nearly lost.



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